THE SILVER TRUMPETS

Reverend William Martin
Covenanter of the Carolinas
Remembered

by Lexington Chase

The Silver Trumpets

Reverend William Martin, Remembered

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In the summer of 1757, a young minister knelt on the banks of the River Bann in County Antrim and rose as the first Covenanting minister ever ordained on Irish soil. He was twenty-eight years old. He had a horse, a Bible, and a calling that would take him across an ocean, through a revolution, into a British prison, and before the most powerful general in the American South — and would still not be finished with him when he died, at seventy-seven, on his knees in a Carolina creek.

This is the story of William Martin.

Told across nine voices and spanning seven decades — from the society meetings of Ulster's townlands to the timber meeting-houses of Revolutionary South Carolina — For Christ's Crown and Covenant is the story of a man who built the Covenanting church in two countries and held it together alone, twice, when everyone else had found somewhere easier to stand.

In June 1780, with the British army occupying the Carolina back country and Tarleton's dragoons burning Presbyterian meeting-houses and killing young men in their own yards, Martin preached the sermon that would define his legend — the War Sermon that sent sixty-four men to face the Crown's forces, and that brought the British to his door the following morning. Arrested at his desk, imprisoned for months in conditions of brutal overcrowding, he was brought before Lord Cornwallis himself at Winnsboro and told to recant.

He did not recant.

But this is not simply a novel of heroism. It is a novel of the full life — of the wife who died young in Ulster, of the loneliness of a man who came home to an empty house for twenty years, of the drinking that the elders spoke to him about and that he acknowledged and could not entirely stop, of the slave named Bob he bought in desperation and sold in shame, of the congregation that left him for a more comfortable church, of the deposition at seventy-two by ministers young enough to be his grandsons, and of the man who kept preaching anyway in opposition to change and perhap because of his failings.

Structured as a series of intimate first-person portraits — by his father, his first wife, his elder, acongregant, his daughter, a ship's captain, a boy of thirteen a British colonel from County Antrim, an old collegue, a young presbyter, and old woman who brought him soup and himself — the novel asks what it costs to hold the ground when the ground gives way beneath you, and what God makes of a man who held it anyway.

"A gripping and spiritually alive portrait of a forgotten giant of Reformed Presbyterian history. Martin's life has found, at last, the storytellers it deserved."

For Christ's Crown and Covenant

The Silver Trumpets

The Covenanter of The Carolinas

Reverend William Martin, Remembered

BY

LEXINGTON CHASE

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps."

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First Edition

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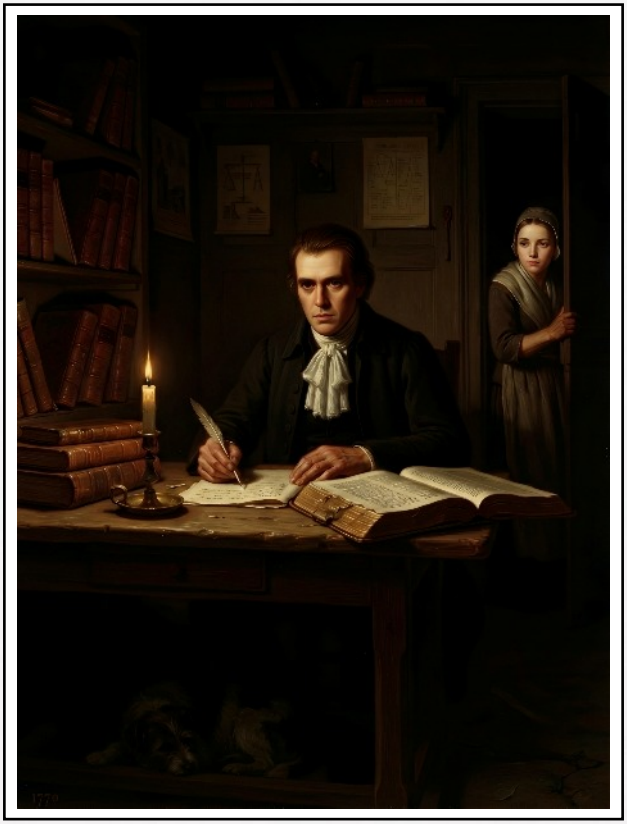

"The scratching of the pen past midnight"

THE SILVER TRUMPETS

WILLIAM MARTIN (1729–1806)

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Numbers chapter X

INTRODUCTION

There is a grave off a woodland trail beside leaf covered wallsteads near Rocky Creek in Chester County, South Carolina. The stone is plain. A marker gives a name and dates simply, which is, when you know the man beneath it, entirely appropriate. William Martin was not a man for monuments.

Yet the life recorded in this novel — is one of the most remarkable in the annals of the Reformed Presbyterian, or Covenanting, church in either Ireland or America. It is a life almost entirely unknown outside the narrow circle of those who have reason to consult the archives. This novel is offered as a partial remedy to that obscurity.

The life of Rev. William Martin spanned seventy-seven years 1729–1806 and two continents, the birth of Irish Presbyterianism's Covenanting ministry, a transatlantic emigration, a revolutionary war, a British imprisonment, and a final deposition that did not stop the man from preaching. What follows is a summary of those facts, arranged to serve as the historical foundation for the novel you are about to read.

Origins and Education in Ulster and Scotland, 1729–1756

William Martin was born on May 16, 1729, the eldest son of David Martin of Ballyspallan, Ballykelly, in the County of Londonderry. He grew up in the Reformed Presbyterian, or Covenanting, tradition — the tradition that traced its descent from the Scottish Covenanters of the seventeenth century, who had maintained against Crown and Parliament alike that Jesus Christ was the sole and supreme King over the nations, and that no civil or ecclesiastical authority could legitimately override his law.

This was not a comfortable inheritance. The Covenanters of Ulster were a dispersed and sometimes persecuted minority, without a minister of their own, dependent on visits from Scottish brethren and on the society meetings — informal gatherings for prayer and Scripture — that sustained the tradition in the absences between those visits. It was in such society meetings, in the barns and fields of County Antrim and Londonderry, that William Martin's faith was formed.

He entered Glasgow University, during the Scottish Enlightenment, then later studied theology under the direction of the Rev. John MacMillan, the leading figure of the Reformed Presbyterian movement in Scotland, and graduated in 1753. He was licensed by the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland on October 10, 1756. The stage was set for an ordination that would be, as it proved, historic.

The First Minister in Ireland, 1757–1772

On July 2, 1757, at the old graveyard of The Vow near Ballymoney, on the banks of the River Bann, William Martin was ordained to the ministry of the Reformed Presbyterian Church — the first Covenanting minister to be ordained on Irish soil. He was, at that moment, the only minister of his denomination in counties Down

and Antrim, and would remain effectively the sole minister of the Covenanting church in Ireland for the better part of a decade.

The weight of this singular responsibility is difficult to overstate. From his base at the old mill at Carnaughts on the Kellswater, he oversaw Covenanting societies at Cullybackey, Laymore, Cloughmills, Ballymoney, and Dervock. He preached in counties Londonderry and Donegal.

The ordinations of other ministers in the following years — including his dear friend and elder Matthew Lynn from Cairncastle near Larne in 1763 gave the Irish church a Presbyterian structure it had lacked, and gave Martin colleagues for the first time. But it was Martin who had held the work together through the years when he alone bore it.

His ministry in Ulster was not without its difficulties. He was passionate about the Gospel and fearless in his opposition to the established church and to the civil authorities who continued to discriminate against his people. He preached against the excessive rack-renting by which landlords who held extensive Ulster estates and who were driving tenant families from their homes. He stood without apology in a tradition that declared her authority of Christ's kingship over nations that had not acknowledged it. These were not positions calculated to win friends in high places.

It was in this context, with the tenant crisis deepening, that Martin began to consider emigration. He had received approaches from Presbyterians and Covenanters in South Carolina, settlers who had gone there from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina, and who had by 1770 begun holding society meetings and writing to Ireland for a minister. Martin responded positively. In 1772, his decision made, he led approximately one thousand souls — Covenanters, Seceders, Presbyterians and others, including Roman Catholics — across the Atlantic to the New World.

The Gathering and the Journeying, 1771- 1772

The emigration of 1772 was conducted in five ships, sailing from Larne, Belfast, and Newry. Martin himself acted as agent for four hundred and sixty families and sailed on the Lord Dunluce, which left Larne on October 4, and arrived in Charleston on December 20. The majority of those who travelled with him came from the vicinities of Ballymoney, Ballyrashane, Derrykeighan, Kilraughts, Ballymena, the heartland of his Ulster ministry.

The crossing was eleven weeks of Atlantic weather, illness, and the enforced intimacy of a ship carrying far more passengers than it was designed to hold. Children were born and people died. Martin preached on deck in fine weather and below in foul. He visited the sick. He buried the dead. He held the community together across a passage that was, by any measure, an ordeal. The immigrants were quarantined on Sullivan's Island before proceeding to Charleston and then inland to the South Carolina piedmont. Martin settled in the area of Rocky Creek in Chester County, where he bought a tract of land one mile square and his people took up bounty land. In 1774, the Covenanters under his leadership built their own meetinghouse — a log building on the same road as the 'Catholic' Presbyterian congregation at Rocky Creek. He was the first Covenanting minister to settle in the South.

The Revolutionary War, 1780–1781

Martin was from the beginning an outspoken critic of British government policies in the colonies. When the Revolutionary War came, he did not stand aside.

In June 1780, following the fall of Charleston to the British and the rapid collapse of American resistance in the South, Martin preached what became known as the War Sermon at Rocky Creek. The meetinghouse was filled beyond capacity — children sat on logs

outside; men acted as sentinels. Martin preached from Numbers chapter ten, on the silver trumpets and the duty of God's people to defend themselves against oppression. He stretched his hand toward the Waxhaws settlement, where Tarleton's dragoons had massacred Buford's retreating Continentals, and said: 'Go see the tender mercies of Great Britain.' He compared the situation of his congregation to that of the Scottish Covenanters hunted from their conventicles and declared that Lord Rawdon had called all Presbyterian churches 'shops of sedition.' Sixty-four men mustered and joined the Patriot forces that day. Martin himself was subsequently arrested by Loyalist militia, taken from his study where he was preparing what he called 'a second blast,' and held first at the blockhouse at Rocky Mount and then at the jail in Camden, where one hundred and sixty prisoners were confined in summer heat. He survived an attempt by General Sumter to rescue the prisoners at Rocky Mount by prising up a floorboard with Thomas Walker and sheltering below the building during the assault. He was eventually taken to Winnsboro for examination by Lord Cornwallis himself.

Readers unfamiliar with the Reformed Presbyterian, or Covenanting, tradition may find some of the theological emphases of the novel unfamiliar and should know something of the historical background.

The Covenanters trace their origin to the Scottish National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, documents through which the Scottish church formally bound itself — and, it believed, the British nations — to a Presbyterian form of church government and to the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as the supreme King of nations. When the Restoration of 1660 swept away the covenanted settlement and re-imposed episcopacy on the Scottish church, a significant body of Presbyterians refused to comply. These were the Covenanters — who maintained

the covenanted position through the years of severe persecution known as the Killing Time (roughly 1680–1688), conducting worship in fields and hillsides, pursued by government dragoons, their ministers outlawed.

The tradition that William Martin inherited was this one. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, in which he was ordained and which he represented in America, understood itself as the direct continuation of the covenanted church of Scotland, maintaining positions — including the doctrine of Christ's exclusive headship over all nations, the singing of Psalms without musical instruments, and the refusal of oaths that acknowledged any sovereignty other than Christ's — that most other Presbyterian bodies had compromised or abandoned. This context is essential for understanding why, when Martin stood before Cornwallis and refused the oath of loyalty to the Crown, he was not primarily making a political statement — or rather, he was making a political statement that was, for him, inextricably a theological one. The Crown's authority was derivative and conditional, subject to the prior authority of Christ. A covenant oath that did not acknowledge this was, by definition, an oath he could not swear.

The exchange that took place between Martin and Cornwallis at Winnsboro became one of the celebrated episodes of the backcountry war. Asked to account for his preaching of rebellion, Martin replied that he owed the King nothing but goodwill; that protection and allegiance go together, and where the one fails the other cannot be exacted; that the Declaration of Independence was 'but a reiteration of what our Covenanting fathers have always maintained.' He was released — in part through the intercession of a Colonel Phillips, a Loyalist officer who had known Martin and his ministry, and whose father had trained horses for the Cornwallis family in Ireland. After the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown in

1781, Martin returned to South Carolina and resumed his charge at Rocky Creek.

The Long Ministry and Its Difficulties, 1782–1801

The years after the war were the hardest of Martin's long ministry. The Reformed Presbytery of America dissolved itself into a union with the Associate (Seceder) church in 1782, forming the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Martin could not follow them. His close friend Matthew Lynn joined and in 1787 made a preaching tour to Chester County staying with his brother John a neighbour of Martin. Perhaps they met. William Martin continued to hold the full Covenanting position: that the American constitution, no less than the British Crown, failed to acknowledge the kingship of Christ over the nations, and that a union that accommodated itself to that failure had compromised the essential inheritance. He remained outside the union — the sole Covenanting minister in America.

Twice in his ministry he had been the sole minister of the Covenanting church: first in Ireland, for six years, and now in America, for a period that stretched into decades. His congregation at Rocky Creek diminished as families joined the Associate Reformed Church, which was better organised, better resourced, and better suited to the growing respectability of Chester County. He continued to preach — at Jackson's Creek, at Wolf Pen or Wolf Pit meetinghouse in Winnsboro, at private houses in all the settlements between Statesville in North Carolina and Louisville in Georgia.

In 1777 he had been dismissed on account of alleged intemperance, though he was restored to his privileges in 1793 and made a member of the Committee of the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, with Revs. King and McGarragh, to manage the affairs of the church in America. His personal life was marked by loss — the death of his first wife in Ulster, his second wife in America, the

difficulties of farm life alone, and the slow erosion of the congregation he had built.

In 1801, the Reformed Presbytery of North America, meeting at Rocky Creek, brought seven charges against him, among them habitual drinking and the holding of slaves. He was deposed from the ministerial office on March 12, 1801. He did not cease preaching.

Death and Legacy, 1806

William Martin died on October 25, 1806, of a fever brought on by a fall from his horse. He was buried in a small graveyard near his cabin. He was seventy-seven years old. William Martin was a man of his times, a pioneer and clear advocate of the Gospel; he fearlessly applied scriptural principles to his contemporary society; a proficient scholar, an eloquent preacher, and an able divine; however his career was marked by the human weaknesses no doubt exacerbated by the extremity of his times and the great trials of ministering on the frontier. He is remembered as one of the most important founders of the cause of Christ's Crown and Covenant in the New World.

The novel uses the voices of those from the historical record who knew him, sometimes in the first person or the third as gives weight to the remembrance. The Ulster dialect has been retained in the dialogue but not in the narrative.

He was like a silver trumpet of Moses used 'for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps.'

That is the record. What lies beneath the record — the specific weight of a man who held his ground alone in two countries, across two oceans, through war and imprisonment and loss and the slow erosion of everything he had built — is the business of the novel.

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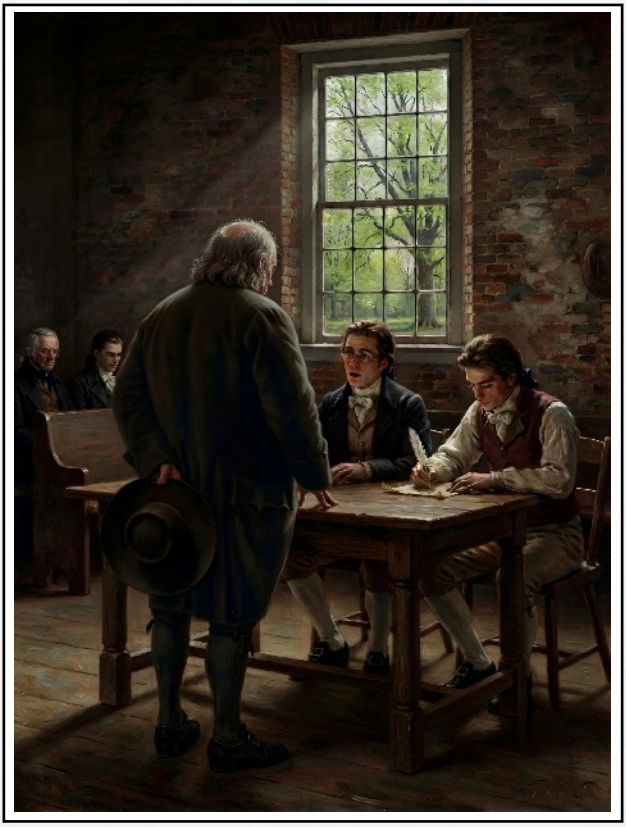


"ye are hereby deposed frae the office o' Christian ministry in aw its pairts" Page 30

PROLOGUE

The Deposition

Rocky Creek, South Carolina — March 12, 1801

Reverend Samuel B. Wylie, Presbytery Commissioner

The old man would not sit down.

Samuel Wylie had asked him twice, quietly, the way you ask a man of seventy-two to spare himself the indignity of standing before a table of younger ministers while charges are read aloud. But William Martin had fixed his eyes on the far wall of the meetinghouse — on the window, in fact, where the Carolina pines stood in their tall indifference — and remained upright, his great hands loose at his sides, his white head bare, as though he were about to preach.

Wylie set down his pen and looked at him properly for the first time since they had convened. Here is the man who was the lion of the Covenant in Ireland, the father of the Irish church, who had embarked on a desperate project to plant Christ's banner in the southern colonies. This had critically weakened the Irish church and after the thirty years of turmoil precipitating rebellion in Ireland, the name of William Stavely had taken his place in present memory.

William Martin, like a phantom from the past, materialised before them being a large man still, though the flesh had settled around him with the years in a way that suggested the bones beneath remembered their former authority. The face was lined and wind-burned, the jaw set in that particular way Wylie had heard described by men who had known him in the great days — men now dead, or gone west, or drifted into the Associate

Reformed churches where the standards sat lighter and slavery's yoke justified. There was a quality to Martin that was difficult to name. Not dignity, exactly, for dignity could be performed. It was something more like weight. The weight of a man who had been tried and had not always passed the trial, yet here he still stood, which in its own fashion was a kind of answer.

Rev James McKinney, who with Wylie, had lately come from Ireland, both fleeing accusations of sedition, was seated to Wylie's left and shuffled his papers. Both men were fruit of Martin's labours in Ireland.

The seven charges lay before them on the table. Wylie had written them out himself, in his careful hand, the ink still sharp and declarative on the page. They were not pleasant charges. Three concerned intemperance — occasions public enough to be witnessed, attested, written down by elders whose names were appended at the foot of the sheet. One concerned the failure to implement church discipline in a matter of known moral scandal within the congregation. One concerned the selling of a Negro man — a boy, it appeared — in direct contravention of the Presbytery's ruling, and in such a way as, the charge stated, *to do everything in his power to prevent himself from ever having it in his power to liberate a poor wretched fellow mortal.* And two further charges concerned Martin's disorderly withdrawal from the committee of the Scottish Presbytery itself, conducted without the consent of the brethren, in a manner that could only be described as contemptuous of right order.

Seven charges. Wylie had counted them again that morning, as though some arithmetic error might reduce the number.

None had been answered satisfactorily.

"*The Presbytery will gang forrit*," he said, "*tae its determination.*"

Still Martin said nothing. He had been permitted to speak, at length, and had spoken. His defence of the matter of the slave had been characteristically direct — "*Ye aa see that I'm agin slaverie, for I hae sauld mine.*"— delivered with a slight lift at the corner of the mouth, as though he understood perfectly well how it would land and had resolved to say it anyway. McKinney had nearly laughed. Wylie had not permitted himself to.

He looked down at the paper before him. The words were already written. He needed only to read them.

The meetinghouse was quiet except for the creak of the roof timbers and the wind finding its way through the ill-fitted window frames. It was a plain brick building, this third Rocky Creek meetinghouse — the first had been built by the first settlers but Martin was ejected from it under the charge of alleged intemperance, but no presbytery dealt with that charge. The second burned in the war, twenty years ago, and Martin had not been the one to build this replacement, having been deposed from the congregation before the cornerstone was laid. The irony was not lost on Wylie. The man who had felled the first trees for a Covenanter meetinghouse in this colony now stood in a building that bore no memory of him.

Or perhaps it did. Perhaps it was all memory. He had never preached here, but every brick bore testimony to his labours. Wylie was twenty-eight years old and had been a minister for less than three years. He had come south from New York to do a necessary thing, and he still believed it was necessary, but standing here now, with Martin's pale eyes steady and the late winter light coming flat through the pines, he felt with uncom-

fortable clarity the difference between a necessary thing and an easy one.

He thought of what he knew. He knew the broad shape of the story, as all in the church knew it — the ordination at the Vow in County Antrim, the fifteen years of itinerant ministry through rain-soaked Ulster, the enormous gamble of the crossing, the eleven weeks on the Lord Dunluce with twelve hundred souls in five ships and smallpox below decks and a minister preaching in whatever weather permitted. He knew the 'War Sermon' that had sent sixty men to face the British dragoons. He knew the trial before Cornwallis, the same Cornwallis who had meted out hard justice to the revolutionary comrades in Ireland. Wylie thought of that reported extraordinary scene in the front room at Winnsboro, the old man erect, grey hair uncovered, speaking of the Declaration of Independence as a reiteration of what our Covenanting fathers have always maintained — and he knew that Martin had walked out of that room alive when better men had not.

He knew all of this, his heart stirred at such a minister of word and sacrament and he knew also the charges on the paper before him.

Both things were true. That was the difficulty.

He thought of the old Covenanter women he had met in the Carolina back-country, the ones who had crossed on the ships as young wives and could recall the smell of the hold and the sound of Psalms sung on an island quarantine and the face of Rev. Martin as he walked among the sick. They did not speak of him with the reverence with which one speaks of saints. They spoke of him the way you speak of someone you know very well — with exasperation and gratitude so thoroughly

braided together that you could no longer say which strand went which way. He was not temperate, they said. And then, before you could draw breath: But there was no one like him for the word of God.

McKinney coughed softly. The other men at the table waited.

Wylie lifted the paper. The words were formal and absolute and entirely inadequate to the occasion, which was the nature of formal words.

"*The Reverend William Martin ye are hereby deposed frae the office o' Christian ministry in aw its pairts*—"

The old man closed his eyes.

Only for a moment.

Then he opened them again, and they were on the pines, on the indifferent possibility of an early Carolina spring, on something Samuel Wylie could not see and perhaps could not have seen even if he had been standing where Martin stood, looking out through the same glass at the same trees.

It was the look, Wylie would think later — in the years when he had time to think, when he was older and had done harder things and still came back to this moment in his memory — it was the look of a man hearing a verdict he had long expected, yet which, arriving at last, still had the weight of a stone.

Not surprise. Something older than surprise. Something that knew, from long acquaintance, the shape of the ground beneath a man when it gives way.

Wylie finished reading.

The room was still.

Martin lowered his great head once, slowly, in what might have been a bow. Then he turned and walked to the door — not quickly, not in anger, but with the measured tread of a man who has somewhere to be, though what that place was or whether he himself knew, Wylie could not say.

The door opened. The cold came in off the pines.

Then he was gone.

Wylie sat for a long time after the others had spoken the necessary words and gathered their papers and gone out into the March afternoon. He sat with the charges before him and thought about a life — how you might travel to the other side of the world in service of Christ's Crown and Covenant, might preach the everlasting gospel in every weather, might send men to face dragoons and stand yourself before a British general and speak truth without blinking, and still end your days in a meetinghouse you did not build, deposed by ministers young enough to be your grandsons.

He thought: what does God make of a man like that?

And then, more quietly: what does a man like that make of God?

He would not know, for many years, how to answer either question. He is not certain he knows now. But he has come to believe that the answer, whatever it is, does not begin in that room on that cold March afternoon.

It begins, as most things do, at the beginning.

It begins with a boy in Ulster, in a hard year, in a barn meeting by Lough Foyle, listening to old men sing the Psalms.

"What is it ye're readin'?" David asked.

"MacMillan," William said. On the "The Faithful & Wise Servant." Page 35

CHAPTER ONE

The Faithful and Wise

County Londonderry, Ulster, Autumn, 1744

David Martin, tenant farmer, father

The harvest had been poor again.

David Martin knew it in his hands before he knew it in his mind — the thinness of the stalks as he gathered them, the way the grain sat light in the sack, the particular silence of a field that has given less than it promised. He had farmed by Lough Foyle for twenty years and he knew the difference between a field resting and a field failing. This year the field was failing, as it had failed the year before, and the year before that, and the Fishmongers' Company in London would want their rent regardless, because the Fishmongers' Company in London had never once put their hands into Ulster soil.

He came in from the field as the light dropped behind the Donegal hills and his wife had the pot on and his three sons at the table — John already broad across the shoulder at sixteen, David the younger still slight and watchful, and William, his middle boy, who was fifteen and reading again.

Always reading. David did not know where the boy had found the book this time. It was old, the binding cracked, and William had it propped against the water jug and was working through it with the particular absorption that shut out the sounds of the house as efficiently as a stone wall. His lips moved slightly. They had always moved when he read.

"*The mate's on the table*," his wife Margaret said, to no one, to everyone.

William looked up. He had his mother's grey eyes, wide-set, and something in the quality of them — a density of attention — that was neither Margaret's nor David's but had appeared in the boy whole and unexplained, as gifts sometimes do.

"*What is it ye're readin'?*" David asked, sitting down.

"*MacMillan*," William said. On the "T*he Faithful & Wise Servant.*"

John made a sound that was not quite a laugh.

"*Lea it,*" Margaret said quietly.

David gave thanks for the food prepared and others of the Lord's bounty — the old words, the words his own father had said, the words reaching back through the generations of Martins who had prayed them in Scotland before the crossing to Ulster, through persecutions and plantations and the long argument with history that the Covenanters had been conducting since 1638. He said them without hurry. He had been raised to believe that prayer was not a preamble to life but the ground of it.

When he opened his eyes William was still looking at him.

"*The Society meets at Drummond on Setterday*," the boy said.

"*I ken it.*"

"*Ye'll take me.*"

It was not quite a question. David looked at his son across the table — the thin face, the uncommon eyes, the book face-down beside the water jug — and felt the familiar compound of pride and unease that William had always produced in him, in the way

that a plant growing with unusual force makes the farmer both glad and slightly afraid.

"*Aye,*" he said. "*I'll take ye.*"

The Society at Drummond met in a barn.

This was not poverty but discretion — or rather it was both, for the Covenanters were a people who had learned to hold their meetings where the law could not easily find them and where they could disperse quickly if need be and barns had the advantage of plausible other purposes. But now the persecution came from scornful dissenter neighbours full of compromise in their comfortable meeting houses with ministers paid for by the King's gift. The townland of Drummond just beyond Newtownlimavady, had hosted the Society meeting for longer than anyone present could remember exactly. The straw was clean. The lanterns were good.

David Martin found himself a place near the back, as was his habit. He was not a man for the front. He observed. He listened. He carried what he heard home and turned it over in the night and let it settle into him slowly, the way all lasting things settle. His faith was like that — not sudden, not loud, but deep-rooted in the way of old timber, which does not shake in ordinary winds.

William stood beside him and was immediately, visibly, somewhere else.

The boy's attention had gone forward into the room the moment they entered, fixed on the men at the front with an intensity that was almost physical, like heat. The Society's elder, old Robert Crawford, was already speaking — on the Solemn League and Covenant, on the descending obligation, on the

wickedness of a Hanoverian settlement that had cast aside the covenanted work of the Second Reformation as though it were a thing of no account and of the love of God. Crawford was not an educated man. He had never been to university. But he had read everything he could lay his hands on for fifty years and he spoke with the conviction of a man who has paid for his opinions in something more costly than ink.

David watched his son.

William's lips had parted slightly. His hands, which had been at his sides, had come up and crossed themselves over his chest, the way he held himself when his mind was fully engaged. He was not fidgeting. He was not half-listening while thinking of something else. He was receiving, David thought — that was the only word for it — receiving the words the way dry ground receives rain, with a total and unhesitating openness.

Crawford moved on to the matter of the ministers. There were none resident in Ireland, he said, as everyone present knew and lamented. For the sacraments, those who were able made the crossing to Scotland, a thing that was difficult for the old and impossible for the poor. The Revs. Nairn and Marshall had made a visit this year — their tour extensive, the need they had found grievous — and had returned to Scotland with a report that the Covenanters of Ulster were scattered and hungry for the word of God and had been so for too long. What was needed, Crawford said, and here his voice took on a quality that David recognised as the specific weight of longing, what was needed was a man.

An man from Ireland.

Someone who knew this ground and these people and the particular quality of suffering they had inherited along with

their theology. Someone who could ride from Donegal to Down, Antrim to Monaghan and back and think nothing of it. Someone who could preach in a barn and at a conventicle in the open air and in a borrowed Seceder meetinghouse and bring the same gospel to all three without diminishing it.

A man.

The meeting was quiet. Outside, the wind moved across the Lough only to moan in the elms behind the barn.

David Martin felt his son shift beside him and glanced sideways. William's face had changed. He could not have said precisely how — the features were the same, the grey eyes, the thin jaw — but something had moved behind them, the way weather moves behind glass. He had seen that look once before, years ago, when William was perhaps seven and had stood at the edge of a field after a storm and watched the sky clear over the Lough, and had said, without preamble or explanation: "*It is unco big, isn't it, Faither?*"

Not a child's observation. Something else. Something David had not known how to answer then and did not know how to name now.

He turned back to Crawford.

But the thought remained with him through the rest of the meeting and through the walk home in the dark and through the night, lying in the low room with Margaret breathing beside him and the wind from the sea finding its way under the door. The thought was this: that he had spent twenty years farming borrowed ground for a company in London that did not know his name, and that his son was going to do something entirely different with his life, and that this was both a grace and a grief,

as all great things are, for the father who sees it coming and can neither prevent it nor entirely wish to.

He had not said anything of this to William.

He did not need to.

At breakfast William had come down early and had the Bible open at the Psalms and was reading with that particular stillness he had, and when David sat down the boy looked up and said, "I want tae gang tae university, please Faither," with the directness of someone announcing a thing already decided rather than requesting permission for a thing desired.

David poured his water.

"*It costs siller*," he said.

"*I ken.*"

"*The harvest wis puir.*"

"*I ken that forbye.*"

A silence. Margaret was at the fire. The younger David and John were still asleep. The morning light came grey through the single window and lay across the table and across the open Psalms and across William's face, which bore the expression of a man prepared to wait as long as necessary for an answer he already knew would come.

David Martin looked at his son. He thought of his own father, who had come to Ulster from Scotland with nothing but a few tools and the scriptures, the Westminster Confession of Faith and a Psalm-book, and had died on this same ground having planted precisely one thing of lasting value: a family that still knew what it believed and why.

He thought of Crawford's voice in the barn. What was needed was a man.

He thought of his boy, fifteen years old, reading MacMillan by the water jug.

"*We'll manage fine*," he said.

William nodded, as though this had never been in doubt. He returned to the Psalms. Outside, the grey morning was lightening over Lough Foyle, and somewhere over the eastern hills, though they could not see it from here, lay Scotland — the Scotland of MacMillan, Renwick, Peden and the Covenants and the old blood-soaked inheritance they had all received, willing or not, from men who had thought Christ's kingship worth dying for.

David bowed his head and said the morning prayers.

His lips moved. His son's moved with him.

"The city smelled of coal smoke and river water" Page 43

CHAPTER TWO

The Enlightened Dark

Glasgow, Scotland — 1750–1753

William Martin, student

The city smelled of coal smoke and river water and the particular human odour of too many people living in close proximity to their ambitions, and William Martin, arriving in Glasgow at twenty-one with a small trunk and a letter of introduction from old Crawford at Drummond, found that he loved it instantly and distrusted his love in equal measure.

He had crossed from Larne on a bad sea and arrived pale and resolute and spent his first night in a lodging house near the university that smelled of mildew and previous tenants. In the morning he walked to the gates and stood looking in at the old quadrangles, at the scholars moving between the buildings in their gowns, at the windows from which one might, on a clear day, see the hills across the Clyde. He was not, he thought, an impressionable man, but the sight of a place given over entirely to the pursuit of ideas — to the proposition that truth was a thing worth chasing with one's whole mind — produced in him a sensation he would have been embarrassed to describe to anyone from Ballyspallan.

He felt, obscurely, that he had arrived somewhere he had always been heading.

The university was in ferment.

It had always been in ferment, as he came to understand — Glasgow seemed to thrive on argument the way other cities thrived on trade, which was perhaps why it thrived so thoroughly on trade as well. But there was a particular energy to

these years, the early 1750s, which had to do with a small group of men who were in the process of dismantling, with considerable elegance, several centuries of received wisdom.

He met them, or their ideas, within the first month. It was impossible not to. David Hume had published his Treatise over a decade earlier but the arguments were still circulating in the lecture rooms and coffee houses with the fresh indignation of recent scandal. Adam Smith taught logic and was already, in conversation, suggesting that markets had a wisdom of their own, independent of any moral design — a proposition William found interesting and alarming in roughly equal proportion. Everywhere the air was thick with the assumption that man, given sufficient reason, was adequate to himself; that the medieval architecture of faith and revelation was a scaffold which the mature mind might safely discard now that the building of human understanding could stand on its own foundations.

William attended these lectures. He argued in the coffee houses. He read Hume with the focused attention of a man studying an opponent and found, to his discomfort, that the opponent was better than he had hoped.

This discomfort was, he would come to believe, the most valuable thing Glasgow gave him.

Not the arguments themselves — though the arguments were real and would serve him well — but the experience of taking them seriously, of refusing the easy path of dismissal, of sitting with Hume's cool dissection of causation and miracle and the testimony of witnesses and saying: *this deserves an answer, not a wave of the hand.* The ministers he had known had not always distinguished between faith and credulity, between the hard-

won confidence of the Covenant and the mere assumption that God agreed with everything they were already inclined to think. Glasgow taught William — was teaching him, imperfectly, painfully — the difference.

He was not popular outside the lecture rooms.

He was too direct. He had an Ulster habit of saying plainly what he meant and then waiting, with what others found an unnerving patience, for a reply. He disagreed with professors when the professors were wrong and did not soften the disagreement with the elaborate courtesies the city seemed to require. He had come here from a barn in Drummond where old Crawford had spoken of Christ's kingship without apology and he was not about to apologise for it now, surrounded by men in fine coats who had never sat in a barn and never been cold and whose theology was essentially the theology of comfort dressed in philosophical language.

But he was also, and he knew it, learning.

He was learning that if you could not answer Hume you had not thought hard enough. He was learning that a Covenanter who could not give account of his faith in the language of the age was a Covenanter armed only for the battles of a previous century. He was learning — this most slowly, most painfully — that the strength of the old position was not its distance from the questions being asked but its capacity to answer them, if only someone would do the work of translation.

He intended to do that work.

There was a girl.

He told himself later that she was not the point — that what mattered was the theology, the ministry, the long vocation

forming itself in him through those three Glasgow years. This was mostly true. But there was a girl, in his second year, the daughter of a Glasgow merchant who attended the Reformed congregation he had found in the city, a small and somewhat beleaguered gathering of folk who sang the Psalms without accompaniment and refused the moderating comfort of the General Assembly's various compromises.

Her name was Agnes. She had a directness to match his own and had read more than he expected and argued with him about the Westminster Confession in a garden one Sabbath afternoon in a way that made him realise, with something like alarm, that he had found her interesting for months before he understood what kind of interesting it was.

Nothing came of it. She married a Glasgow merchant's son the following year and William received the news without ceremony, which was how he received all news that could not be altered. He had, by then, begun to understand that the ministry was not an addition to a life but a shape that organised a life, and that certain other shapes would not fit alongside it, or would require a woman of unusual fortitude to inhabit.

He wrote home to his father. The letter was factual and warm and said nothing about Agnes. It said a great deal about the state of Covenanting in Scotland, about the young men recently licensed by the Presbytery, about the sending of John Cuthbertson to North America about the visits of George Whitfield and the strange hunger for something they produced in people who would not have called themselves hungry.

He was beginning, he wrote, to understand what he was for.

In his third year he sat one evening in his room above the Clyde with Hume on the table and the Bible beside it and the darkness

coming down over the water, and he held the two books in his mind the way you hold two tools and feel the difference in their weight, assessing what each is made for.

Hume was brilliant. This had to be admitted plainly, because dishonesty about your opponent is a form of cowardice. Hume had looked at the machinery of human knowledge and described it with terrible precision, and what he had found was that the machinery ran on habit and assumption and the animal comfort of pattern, and that when you looked behind the curtain of causation you found not God but simply the fact that things had tended to follow other things in the past and the mind had developed the habit of expecting them to do so again.

William sat with this.

The wind came off the Clyde. Somewhere below him in the street a man was arguing with another man about the price of something.

He thought about the Psalms. Not as argument but as fact — the fact of them, the way they had been in his mouth since childhood, the way his father's lips had moved in the morning grace and his lips had moved with him, the way Crawford's voice in the barn had carried something that was not explicable as habit or assumption because it was aimed at something outside and beyond the men who uttered it. He thought about the crossing of the Covenanters from Scotland to Ulster and back again, all those people carrying their theology like seed across bad water, planting it in borrowed ground, losing children to famine and landlords and the indifference of governments, and still singing.

What did Hume make of that?

What did Hume make of a man like Crawford, who had nothing — no education, no power, no protection from the company in London that owned his land — and who had stood in a barn and spoken of Christ's kingship with the steady confidence of a man reporting a fact?

The habit of faith, Hume would say. The comfort of inherited pattern.

William looked out at the darkening river.

No, he thought. *Not habit.* Habit wears smooth and grows easier with use. What Crawford had was not easier than it had been for his fathers — it was harder, because it had cost more, generation by generation, and still he held it. That was not the behaviour of habit. That was the behaviour of a man who has seen something, and cannot unsee it, and will not pretend to.

He picked up the Bible and opened it at Psalm seventy-two and read it in the dim light with the river below him and the coal smoke drifting past the window, and felt — not reasoned, not argued into, but felt — the thing that Hume had no instrument for measuring, because Hume's instruments were all made for the horizontal and this was vertical, coming from above or perhaps from below or perhaps from the place where below and above cease to be separate directions.

He closed the book.

He thought: *I'm gawn tae spen me days adaein this. Stannin in the gap atween what the age believes an what's true, an refusin tae let them be taen for the selfsame thing.*

He thought: *I'm reddy.*

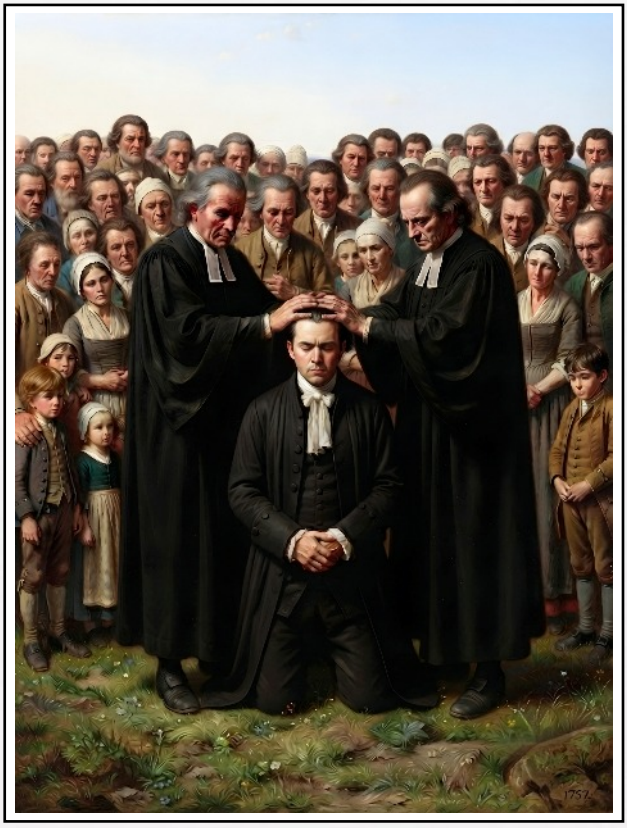
He was, of course, twenty-three years old and had suffered very little, which meant he was not remotely ready. But the readiness

would come. It always comes the same way — not through argument but through loss, not through certainty but through the slow education of circumstance, not in Glasgow lecture rooms with Hume on the table but in rain-soaked Ulster fields and in barns full of humble people waiting to be told the truth and in the faces of dying children in a storm on the Atlantic.

He did not know this yet.

He blew out the lamp.

He slept.



"This is the day ma man bicame somebody else's." Page 56

CHAPTER THREE

The Vow on the Bann

County Antrim, Ulster — July 2, 1757

Mary Martin, his first wife

She had sewn the Geneva gown herself.

This was not a thing she would have mentioned to anyone, because it was the kind of detail that embarrassed William, who believed that the externals of an occasion should be subordinate to its substance and that too much attention to the former was a sign of insufficient regard for the latter. He was not unkind about it. He simply did not notice things made of cloth the way he noticed things made of words.

But Mary had sewn the gown, three weeks of evening work by the fire after he had gone to read, and she knew every stitch of it, and when she watched him walk out to the ancient graveyard by the River Bann where the crowd had gathered — hundreds of them, she had not expected hundreds, she had expected perhaps forty or fifty, but they had come from Donegal and from Down and from Antrim and from places she did not know the names of — when she watched him walk out in the gown she had sewn, she felt something that she could not have separated into its component parts even if she had tried.

Pride was in it. Certainly.

Fear was in it also. She had been married to him for three months and she knew already the shape of what she had agreed to — the long absences, the horse taken out in weather no sensible man would ride in, the evenings given to letters and

sermon preparation that stretched past midnight while she lay awake listening to his pen scratch on the paper in the next room. She had known these things before she said yes, which was to her credit, and she had said yes anyway, which was either to her credit or her folly, and she had not yet determined which.

But what she felt most, watching him walk out in the gown, was something she had no name for. Something that had to do with the crowd — with seeing these people, hundreds of them, who had come from the scattered places to which the Covenanters had been dispersed across the province, who had come on foot and on horseback in the July heat to witness this one thing: a minister. Their minister. The first minister to be ordained in Ireland. The thing that had been wanted and prayed for and despaired of and prayed for again across decades, arriving now in the form of this man she had married, this large, serious, sometimes infuriating man who left books face-down on the table and forgot to eat and had told her, two weeks into their marriage, that his congregation was his first responsibility on this earth, which she had received with the composure of a woman who had already decided to believe him.

She found a place near the back of the crowd. A woman from Ballymoney she did not know moved aside to make room without being asked.

At the front, the Revs. MacMillan and Courtass had taken their places. The sun was high and the Bann moved below them, dark brown and unhurried. Someone behind her had a child on their shoulder, a small girl who was watching the proceedings with the attentiveness of a child who understands that the adults around her are engaged in something important, though not yet what it is.

William stood before MacMillan his mentor and tutor, whose solemn lectures had burnished off the grime of university values and city life. They stood in an open Ulster field under the Covenant God of Heaven.

Mary had watched him in many attitudes — reading, arguing, praying, sleeping, occasionally laughing, rarely enough that she treasured it — but she had not seen him like this. He was still. Not the stillness of a man suppressing movement but the stillness of a man in whom all movement has momentarily found its centre. His hands were at his sides. His face was turned toward MacMillan with an expression she recognised from the moments in prayer when he forgot she was in the room and spoke to God as though to a person.

Not performed.

Real.

The words of the ordination service carried on the air, which had the quality of summer air in a hollow — close and warm, with the smell of the river and the grass and the bodies of the crowd. MacMillan's voice was strong and deliberate, each sentence weighted with the gravity of a man who understood that what was happening here was not merely administrative but covenantal — not merely the ordaining of a preacher but the binding of a man to a calling in the sight of God and this cloud of witnesses.

The questions came.

"*Dae ye believe the Scriptures o' the Auld and New Testaments tae be the Word o' God?*"

"*I dae*".

"*Dae ye accept the Westminster Confession o' Faith as approved by the Kirk o' Scotland in 1647 tae be founded upon and agreeable tae the word o' God and in daein sae dae ye subscribe it as a statement o' yer faith*?"

"*I dae*".

"*Dae ye accept the descendin obligation o' the Covenants?*"

"*I dae*". The words which separated him from the body of synods and seceders.

The simplicity of it. Two words carrying the whole weight of everything he had argued with in Glasgow, everything he had sat with by the Clyde in the lamp-less dark, everything that had been tested against Hume and MacMillan and the long inheritance from men who had bled for the same confession.

"*I dae*".

Mary closed her eyes.

She was not a woman given to religious experience in the dramatic sense — she did not have visions or hear voices or tremble during sermons. Her faith was practical and tenacious and expressed itself primarily in the doing of things that needed doing. But in the dark behind her closed eyes she felt something pass through the crowd, something that was not imagination because imagination is private and this was not private, it was happening in hundreds of people simultaneously, a change in the quality of the silence, a deepening, as though the ground itself had shifted fractionally and settled again in a new and permanent arrangement.

She opened her eyes.

William was kneeling.

MacMillan and Courtass had laid their hands on his head, gnarley faced elders who had weathered the years of descending obligation, gathered around and under plain garments their hearts swelled with the deepest joy from the Lord and they believed, like Simeon they could now depart in peace. The gesture was so ancient and so weightless in the summer air — two pairs of old hands resting on the head of a young man by an Irish river in the sight of God and four hundred Covenanters — that Mary felt her throat close, not with grief but with something adjacent to grief, which is the feeling produced by beauty that you know will cost something.

And she thought: *This is the day ma man bicame somebody else's.*

Not lost to her. She did not mean it that way. But changed, and the change was formal now, witnessed, irreversible. He had always been heading here — the reading, the arguing, the scratching of the pen past midnight, the way he listened to Crawford in the barn at Drummond when he was fifteen with the look of a man hearing the terms of a contract he intends to sign. She had known it. She had married him knowing it.

But knowing a thing and watching it arrive are different experiences, separated by all the distance between the mind and the heart.

Around her the crowd was silent, and the silence was the kind that accumulates when many people are witnessing the same thing and all of them understand its weight. Behind her the child on the man's shoulder had gone very still.

MacMillan raised his voice and spoke the words of consecration.

Somewhere in the crowd a woman was weeping quietly — not in grief, Mary thought, but in the way you weep when something you have waited for so long arrives that the waiting and the arriving run together and produce an emotion that has no name.

William rose.

He turned to face the congregation — his congregation now, hungry and patient Covenanters who had walked and ridden from the far ends of the province for this moment — and the look on his face was not triumph. It was not relief. It was the look of a man who has just fully understood the size of the thing he has agreed to and is not, by any ordinary measure, equal to it, and intends to do it anyway.

Mary thought: *there he is.*

There's the man I married.

She did not know, standing in the slight rise above the Bann on that July afternoon with the sun on the water with these saints around her and her husband's new gown catching the light that she had perhaps five years left. She could not have known it. The body keeps its secrets until it cannot.

But she would have gone forward anyway, into those five years, into the long Antrim winters and the absences and the house full of people who needed him and the moments when he forgot to eat and the rare, precious moments when he laughed — she would have gone forward into all of it with the same composure with which she had sewn the gown, stitch by stitch in the evenings, making something that had to hold.

MacMillan turned to the congregation.

"*Receive yer minister*," he said.

And the people, who had been waiting for this across fifty years and longer, across the water from Scotland and across the decades of dissent and across the aching distance between a promise and its fulfilment, exhaled.

The child on the shoulder clapped her small hands once, not knowing why, only feeling the change in the air.

The Bann moved on below them, dark and unhurried, toward the sea.

"One man on a horse in all weathers, riding past the well-filled meetinghouses of the Seceders and the Presbyterians to arrive at a barn or a mill or a hillside where a handful of people" Page 62

CHAPTER FOUR

The Shepherd

County Antrim, & County Londonderry Ulster — 1757-1772

Reverend Matthew Lynn, elder and minister

I had known him before I knew I was going to know him.

That is the only honest way to account for the beginning of it. He was already the minister of the Antrim congregation when I came into the full exercise of my faith — already riding the circuit from Kellswater to Donegal to Conlig, Dromore to Cloughmills and back again, already the man whose name was spoken in the society meeting at Cairncastle the way you speak of someone whose presence, though physically absent, is nonetheless the largest thing in the room. I was two years his junior and had grown up in the same tradition — the Psalms without accompaniment, the Westminster standards, the descending obligation of the Covenant that our fathers had maintained in Scotland through blood and had carried to Ulster in their bundles and planted here, generation by generation, in borrowed ground where at the foot of the Glens my grandfather had heard Sandy Peden preach as a man answering the martyrs' call.

I was an elder in his session before I was anything else. This is the fact from which everything else proceeds.

He ordained me to that office in the meetinghouse at Carnaughts above the Kellswater in '57— a plain room in the old watermill, a plain service, the plainness being itself a theological statement, as plainness always is with Covenanters — and afterward he shook my hand with the grip of a man transferring

a weight rather than offering a courtesy, and said: "*Ye'll be needed, Matthew.*" Not *congratulations* or *well done* or any of the various affirmations that the occasion might have invited. "Ye'll be needed". Which was his way — the direct statement of the actual situation, undecorated, aimed at the person who needed to receive it.

I received it.

I did not know then that he meant needed in a way that would carry me to Scotland and back and eventually to the Vow again, kneeling in the August grass in 1763 while MacMillan's hands lay on my head and the same words were spoken over me that had been spoken over William Martin six years before.

But I am going ahead of myself.

The situation when I took up the eldership was this: one man.

He was one man for the entirety of the Covenanting witness in Ireland — from Donegal to Down, from the north Antrim coast down to the borders of Monaghan, every society meeting, every communion season, every deathbed and every wedding and every Sabbath in between. One man on a horse in all weathers, riding past the well-filled meetinghouses of the Seceders and the Presbyterians to arrive at a barn or a mill or a hillside where a handful of people — sometimes a handful, sometimes hundreds, for the Vow could draw crowds that shamed the denominations with their proper buildings — waited for the word of God delivered in the old way, without concession, without the softening that other churches had permitted themselves in the interest of social acceptability.

I watched him do it for three years as I went to and from Scotland to finish my training in Glasgow. I want to say something about those three years that is not hagiography, because Martin would not have tolerated hagiography and I learned that from him before I learned most other things. The truth is that what I witnessed was not effortless. It was not the performance of a man so constituted by God that the demands of his calling sat lightly on him, as though the weight were being carried somewhere else and he merely walked unburdened through the ministry. That is not what I saw. What I saw was a man who bore the full weight of the thing and kept going regardless, which is a different matter entirely and in some respects more instructive, because effortless gifts belong to the man who has them and cannot be transferred, whereas the willingness to bear weight and continue — that can be learned, if you are paying attention and the teacher is not concealing the cost.

He was not concealing anything.

I saw him return from a circuit of County Down in November — I was at Carnaughts when he arrived, having been kept there by a matter of congregational business — and he dismounted in the rain and the horse looked more recovered from the journey than the man did. He had ridden three days in continuous rain, preached twice daily, and buried a child at Ballymena in the grey morning before starting back. He came into the meetinghouse and sat down on the bench by the door and closed his eyes and was, I believe, asleep for perhaps thirty seconds before he opened them again and said: "*Is there onything requirin attention?*"

There was. There always was.

He attended to it.

I said nothing about the three days or the child or the rain. He would not have wanted me to and I knew him well enough to know it.

The Presbytery had need of a clerk — their own clerk being unwell and their business considerable, with five young men in various stages of training for ministry and the ongoing oversight of the Irish work requiring documentation — and Martin suggested me. He did not ask whether I wished to go. He said: "*The Presbytery needs a clerk. Ye're the man for it*". And then he looked at me with those steady grey eyes and waited.

I said I would go.

I want to be plain about what that cost him. Without me his session was depleted. Without a session he bore the full administrative weight of the congregational business on top of the pastoral and preaching load that was already, by any ordinary measure, beyond what one man should carry. He knew this when he suggested me. He suggested me anyway, because the Presbytery's need was real and the man he was sending was suited to the work.

This was characteristic. I understood it then and I have understood it better since.

I went to Scotland in 1760. In Scotland I served as clerk and studied under the Rev. MacMillan junior — and what I received there was not merely the formal instruction required for ministry but something harder to name, something that had to do with the tradition itself, with sitting for three years inside the full weight of it and coming to understand from the inside what Martin was carrying on behalf of all of us in Ireland. The

Presbytery was a small body — depleted by controversy and by the demands of the American work — but it was serious in the way that small bodies forced into seriousness by circumstance often are, the way a narrow river runs faster than a wide one.

I was licensed at Carnaughts meetinghouse in July 1761. Martin was there. He said nothing at the reception afterward that I remember. He simply shook my hand again — the same grip as the eldership, the same transfer of weight — and said: "*Guid. Noo the work begins in earnest*".

He was right. It always did, with him.

For two years after my licensing I assisted him throughout the province.

This was the period I think of when I think of what it means to be the sole minister — not the title but the reality of it, the daily specific texture of responsibility without relief. Martin had carried it since 1757. I was arriving into it in 1761 and would carry it alongside him until my own ordination, and I want to set down here what I saw in those two years, because it is important and because the man himself would never have set it down.

He preached, in a year, more Sabbaths than the calendar contained. He achieved this by the simple expedient of preaching twice on Sabbath and once or twice on weekdays and by covering distances between appointments that would have seemed impractical if you did not know him, which most people who commented on the distances did not. I accompanied him on portions of the circuit and kept something like a record, not from method but from the clerk's habit of docu-

mentation. In the autumn of 1762 he preached at Corkermain beside Cairncastle above Larne, on a Sabbath morning — in my family's home, a kindness I noted — and rode to Dunloy for the evening service, a distance of perhaps twenty five miles on roads that deserved a better word, and on the Monday preached again at Ballymena and on the Tuesday was at Dervock and on the Wednesday had returned to Kellswater for a session meeting and on the Thursday was in Cloughmills and on the Friday I lost track of him and did not see him again until the following Sabbath.

He was not in good health that autumn.

I knew this because I had known him long enough to read the signs he did not advertise — a quality of stillness that was not the usual stillness of a man who has made his peace with his pace but the different stillness of a man conserving something. He ate less than he should have. He slept when he could and not always when he intended to, as I discovered on the several occasions when I found him asleep in a chair with a document in his hand that had been meant for reading.

I said nothing about it. He would not have wished it.

What I want to record is this: in November of that year his first wife Mary died.

I was at Ballymoney when it happened. I knew before he told me, from the quality of the morning when he came to the meetinghouse — the specific quality of a morning after which nothing is the same — and when he said "*Mary's awa*" in the voice I have already described, the voice of a man reporting a fact that his body does not yet believe, I did what needed doing and did not attempt any of the consolations that the occasion did not have room for.

He preached at her funeral.

I was in the congregation and I will not attempt a full account of it here — that belongs to another record and another witness more qualified than I am by proximity to the occasion — but I will say this: I had heard William Martin preach perhaps a hundred times by then and I knew the range of what he was capable of, which was considerable, and what happened on that morning with his wife's body in the Session room was beyond the range. It was beyond the range in the way that certain things are beyond the range of explanation — not louder, not more elaborate, but underneath all the language in a different place, a place where the preacher is not performing but simply open, entirely visible, and the congregation looks through the opening and sees, not the man, but the thing the man is in the act of believing.

Old men wept.

I am not a man easily moved in public. I am too much formed by the clerk's habit of observation, the professional distance of a man who takes notes. I did not weep, but I sat in my pew and felt the ground shift, which is a different thing and in some ways more permanent.

I was ordained at the Vow on the Bann in August 1763.

The Revs. MacMillan and Courtass again, as at Martin's ordination six years before — the same river, the same open field with the slight rise beside the ancient site of Christian worship, the same sky that was doing what Ulster skies do in August, which is everything at once. Martin was present as moderator. I will not describe the service at length — it was not, in any outward

particular, very different from his, save that the crowd was perhaps smaller, there being fewer years of accumulated longing behind my ordination than behind his.

What was different was the thing that happened afterward, when the crowd had dispersed and Martin and I stood for a moment by the river before the business of the day required us elsewhere.

He said: "*The Bannside congregation is yours noo.*"

I said: "*Aye.*"

He said: "*You'll be needed.*"

The same words he had said when he ordained me elder. I understood now what he had meant then, which I had only partially understood at the time.

I said: "*I know it.*"

He looked at the river for a moment. "*It will be better noo, he said, wi' the twa o' us.*"

This was the nearest thing to a personal disclosure I had received from him in four years of close association. I held it carefully, the way you hold a thing you know is not freely distributed.

"*Aye,*" I said. "*Better.*"

With my ordination, the Irish Reformed Presbytery could be formally constituted — the necessary plurality of ministers existing at last, on Irish ground, after the long years of waiting. This was not a small thing. It was in fact the thing we had been moving toward since before either of us could remember, since before the society meetings in the barns and the Vow conven-

ticles at the Round Hole in Ballymena and the long travelling ministry that MacMillan had maintained through his Irish visits — the formal existence of a presbytery in Ireland, a church structure rooted in Irish ground and answerable to Irish circumstances, not merely a visited mission but an embodied presence.

Martin chaired the first meeting of the Irish Reformed Presbytery with the gravity of a man who understood exactly what had just become possible and intended to treat it accordingly.

He was also, I noticed, relieved.

I do not mean relieved in the sense of a burden lifted — the burdens were not lighter for the existence of the Presbytery, only differently distributed. I mean relieved in the way a man is relieved when the thing he has been holding in position by sheer force of will for a very long time is at last supported by something outside himself. He had been the sole support of the entire Irish Covenanting witness for six years. For six years, if he had stopped — if illness or accident or plain human exhaustion had stopped him — there would have been nothing. No ministry. No sacraments. No oversight. The societies would have continued meeting, as they had continued meeting for decades before his ordination, and the tradition would have survived, as it had survived, in that stripped and patient form. But the ministry itself, the formal ordered ministry of word and sacrament and discipline — that had rested entirely on one man.

Now there were two.

We sat in the meetinghouse at Kirkhills after the first Presbytery meeting and ate supper that one of the elder's wives, Nancy Anderson, had made and said very little for a while, and I understood that the silence was a form of thanksgiving that

neither of us felt the need to render into words. As a mark of parting grace, the spirit of hospitality in a small tumbler accompanied them into the night.

The accusation came in the spring of 1765.

I want to be precise about this because precision is what the matter deserves, and because imprecision is what those who wished the Reformed Presbyterian Church ill had been relying on.

The charge, as it reached me first — before the formal complaint was lodged, in the form of rumour, which is the form such things prefer because rumour cannot be answered in the way that formal charges can — was that I had conducted a marriage in Largy, a Presbyterian meetinghouse near Dungiven that was irregular in its nature: specifically, that one of the parties was a minor and that the marriage had been conducted without parental consent. This was not merely a canonical irregularity. In the eyes of the law it was potentially a criminal matter. In the eyes of the community it was the kind of thing that, regardless of any subsequent verdict, attached itself to a man's name and remained there.

I want to say plainly: I had done no such thing.

I want also to say plainly that my saying so is not the relevant point — the relevant point is the investigation, and the investigation is what I must recount, because the investigation is where the character of William Martin and the competence of the Irish Reformed Presbytery are properly visible, and these are the things worth setting down.

When the complaint reached Presbytery — formally, in writing, lodged by the party who claimed injury — Martin convened a meeting at Garvagh. He was moderator. He was also, in the way of a man whose congregational gravity had organised itself over eight years into something that filled a room without effort, the effective centre of proceedings.

He opened the meeting with prayer.

The prayer was not short. Martin's prayers were never short, having been formed in the Covenanting tradition that understood prayer as a form of transacted business with God rather than a preamble to the actual work, and this prayer was particularly thorough because the actual work required it to be. He prayed for the Presbytery's wisdom. He prayed for clarity in the examination of facts. He prayed for the reputation of the church, which was — he said this plainly, in prayer, which was how he said everything plainly — at stake in the manner of its conducting, not only in the conclusion it reached. He prayed for me, by name, which was the thing I had not expected and which I received with the composed face of a man who has learned from his minister that composure is the form dignity takes under pressure.

Then the examination began.

I had been advised, by one of the Presbytery's friends in the broader Presbyterian community, that I should be cautious in my manner of presenting my defence — that a minister who appeared too confident of his innocence was sometimes taken, by the suspicious, as evidence of prepared deception rather than actual innocence. I ignored this advice, partly because it struck me as the counsel of a world in which truth was a performance rather than a fact, and partly because I had been

Martin's elder and then his colleague for seven years and had learned from him that the direct statement of the actual situation was always, in the end, the most powerful form of advocacy.

I said what had happened.

I had been in the vicinity of Dungiven in the period in question. I had conducted no marriage, regular or irregular. I had not been present in the meetinghouse named. I could produce witnesses to my whereabouts on the days in question, which the session clerk was prepared to set before the Presbytery in documented form.

The documents were examined.

The witnesses were examined.

The party who had lodged the complaint was examined.

Martin conducted the examination with the same quality of attention he brought to everything — entirely present, nothing missed, the grey eyes moving between the documents and the witnesses and the complainant with the unhurried thoroughness of a man who is not trying to reach a conclusion but to find one. He asked precise questions. He did not ask leading questions. He did not ask questions designed to embarrass the complainant, though the complainant's account had inconsistencies that would have been easy to press. He asked questions designed to establish what had actually happened, which is a more difficult and more important thing.

At one point — this I remember with particular clarity — the complainant made a claim about my presence at the Largy meetinghouse on a specific day and Martin asked, quietly, with no alteration of expression: "*What wis the weather that day?*"

The complainant said it had been fine.

Martin said nothing. He made a note. The witnesses who had established my whereabouts on that day had also noted the weather. It had rained without stopping from Tuesday to Friday that week. This was the kind of small specific fact that a constructed account does not know to include.

The Presbytery absolved me.

The verdict was what it was and I will not dwell on the formalities of it. What I want to set down is what Martin said to me afterward, in the yard of the Garvagh meeting while the other members of the Presbytery were making their preparations to depart.

He stood beside me in the late afternoon light and said nothing for a moment. Then he said: "*Ye ken what this is.*"

I said: "*Tell me what ye think it is.*"

He said: "I*t is what happens when a wee and no weel-respected body is in a position whaur it can be used. We are fair game, Matthew. That is the phrase I have heard used, and it is accurate. Fair game — tae be shot at, if the shooter has a grievance and believes that the target has insufficient protection tae mak the shootin costly.*"

I thought about this. "*The impersonation*,"I said. Because even then, though we could not prove it, the shape of what had happened was visible enough: someone had used my name, in the Largy meetinghouse, with the deliberate or careless intention of leaving behind a confusion that could be exploited. "*Ye believe somebody used my name.*"

"*I believe somebody used yer name*," Martin said. "*Whether frae malice toward ye or toward the kirk or frae simple cowardice seekin cover, I*

cannae say. But I believe the examination made clear that the marriage wis performed — only no by ye."

I said: "*It will follow me.*"

He looked at me steadily. "*For a time. No forever. The truth has a patience that slander disnae.*" He paused. "B*ut I want ye tae ken, Matthew — I want ye tae hear this plainly — that the Presbytery investigated this matter as it should hae been investigated, and reached the conclusion that the evidence required, and that conclusion stands. Whatever follows, it stands.*"

He was right about the truth's patience. Many years later — years after both of us had crossed the Atlantic for reasons neither of us could have fully anticipated at that moment — the man who had impersonated me made a deathbed confession. The slur was lifted formally from my name by a testimony I never heard delivered.

I had not been present, by then, to hear it. But I was glad of it, even from a distance, not for my own sake — I had carried the weight of it long enough that it had become simply a fact of the landscape — but for the sake of the thing the investigation had demonstrated, which was that a church without earthly power or established position was capable nonetheless of doing justice on its own ground, in its own meetinghouse, according to its own standards, with its moderator asking precise questions about the weather.

The years between my ordination in 1763 and Martin's departure for Carolina in 1772 were the years of the growth.

This is not a phrase I use lightly or as a figure of speech. It was actual growth, documented in the ordinations and the congre-

gations established and the names of men who entered the ministry in those years, and I want to set it down plainly because it is easy, in the retrospect of what happened afterward — the emigration, the losses, the dissolution — to read the period as merely a prelude to departure rather than as a thing complete in itself.

The work of the Scottish Presbytery that Martin had held together in Ireland, alone for six years now had, by degrees, the company of other men.

Five men were called to ministry within a generation as though the ground itself were producing them. William James was ordained to the congregation at Bready in 1765, which meant there was now a Covenanting minister on the western side of the province, ministering to the people of that county who had until then been dependent on my extensive circuit. I remember the day of that ordination — Martin moderating again — and thinking: three of us now. Three men for a province that had had one.

Daniel McClelland followed — a man whose journey was more complex, having been born near Dungiven and raised in Philadelphia, which gave him a quality that was neither fully Irish nor fully American but something in between, something that proved useful in the Cullybackey congregation where the people were various in their backgrounds and not easily managed by a single register of pastoral approach. Martin had identified him early and corresponded with the Scottish Presbytery regarding his training. The ordination to Cullybackey in 1765 gave us four.

Thomas Hamilton was the most unexpected of the four — a former Presbyterian minister, which meant he carried with him

the habits and assumptions of a different tradition, assumptions that required some patient unlearning and some patient relearning, and which Martin supervised with the combination of firmness and respect that a man of genuine conviction can extend to the conscientious converts of other positions. Hamilton was ordained to the Glendermott Society in 1770, completing what now constituted a genuine Presbytery — not merely the canonical minimum but a functioning body with ministers distributed across the province and capable of mutual oversight and support in the way that one man alone never can be.

Five ministers. A Presbytery. The congregations of Drimbolg and Ballylaggan organised in 1763, Cullybackey in 1765. The societies at Laymore, Cloughmills, Dervock, Ballymoney, Kilraughts maintaining their meetings and now receiving regular ministerial attention.

I set down these names and dates not from the clerk's reflex of documentation alone — though that reflex is present — but because they represent something that had been prayed for and laboured toward and despaired of and prayed for again over a generation, and that generation deserves to have the answer to its prayers recorded.

There is a thing about growth that the ministers of established and comfortable churches perhaps do not experience with the same force that we experienced it in those years: growth in difficulty has a quality that growth in ease does not, a quality of miracle that cannot be accounted for by the usual explanations of institutional momentum or social preference.

We were not the comfortable option. We were never the comfortable option. The Secession Church was growing faster and was better organised and had more resources and sat more easily with the established order. The Synod of Ulster, for all its struggles, had the weight of social respectability that we conspicuously lacked. We were the small body — the ones who sang the Psalms without instruments in an age that had decided this was a mark of peculiarity who maintained the full Covenanting position in an age that had decided this was a mark of inflexibility, who rode to barn meetings and hillside conventicles past full meetinghouses and thought ourselves not diminished by the comparison but called by it.

The people who came to us — who stayed with us, who sent their sons to Scotland for training, who built the meetinghouses and who gathered at the Round Hole in Ballymena or who stood on the hillock at the Vow in their hundreds on the days of the great communions — these people were not coming because we were convenient. They were coming because we were, in their judgment, true. Because the position we maintained was the position their forefathers had bled for in Scotland and their grandfathers had carried across the water to Ulster, and they were not prepared to set it down because the setting down would have been easier.

Martin knew this about them. It was, I think, one of the central facts of his ministry — that he was not building something new but maintaining something very old in a new context, and that the maintenance required not innovation but faithfulness, not the attraction of fresh appeal but the steadiness of a man who holds his ground.

He held his ground.

He held it alone for six years and then, by the grace of God and the work of the Presbytery, not alone.

In the spring of 1771 he told me he was considering the crossing.

We were at Carnaughts after a session meeting, the late evening coming down over the Kellswater River, the sound of the water in the mill race the way it always was — continuous, unhurried, indifferent to human urgency. He had received correspondence from South Carolina. He showed it to me. The letter was from people who had heard of him, from Covenanters in the Chester district who had been without a minister of their own tradition and who were asking — were asking him, specifically him, the father of the Irish church — whether there was any hope of assistance.

I read it.

I said: "*They need a minister.*"

He said: "*Aye.*"

I said: "*Ye're thinkin o' goin yersel'.*"

He looked at me with the grey eyes. "*I'm thinkin o' takin the congregation.*"

I sat with this. Outside, the Kellswater ran on. "*The hale congregation.*"

"*Them that will come. There are men amang them that hae nae future here. There is land there. Real land, Matthew — no rented frae a company in London or under a wastrel o' an Earl, but land that can be owned, that cannae be rack-rented oot frae under a man that has spent his life improvin it. The Peep 'o' Day boys will drive this country tae war and I want for my people nae pairt in it.*"

I thought about the Presbytery. About the five of us — six if you counted McClelland, who had already returned to America. I thought about what the congregation's departure would mean for the Irish church — the hundreds of families, the names I had known since childhood, the Stephensons and Andersons and Crawfords and the young men whom Martin had been watching and encouraging toward ministry.

I said: "*It will leave a gap.*"

"*I ken it.*" He was quiet for a moment. "I *have thought about naethin else for six month. Ye will think I hae weighed the Irish kirk and found it wantin — I hae not. But I hae weighed the congregation and found that what they need is no available tae them here. What they need is ground. What they need is liberty. What they need is a future that disnae depend on the guidwill o' a Landlord or bishop.*" He paused. "*I hae no built this kirk for nearly fifteen year in order tae leave it tae naebody. There will be men ordained. There will be Stavely. There will be ithers. The kirk will survive my departure — I believe that, Matthew. I am no certain it wad survive anither decade o' what thae families are endurin.*"

I said nothing for a while.

He said: "*I am tellin ye first. Afore I tell the congregation. Afore I speak tae the Presbytery.*"

This was the greatest confidence he had extended to me in fourteen years. I received it as such.

"*When?*" I said.

"*Next year. The spring sailins if we can.*"

I looked at the Kellswater. I thought about what it meant to be the minister who stayed, which was what I would be — one of the ministers who stayed, in a church diminished by the depar-

ture of its founding father and three hundred of the families who had been its substance.

I thought: this is the desert place. This is what it means to hold the ground.

I said: "*The kirk will survive.*"

He looked at me. "*Ye'll see tae it.*"

Not a question. The same statement he had made when he ordained me elder, when he sent me to Scotland, when he told me about the accusation and what it meant. "*Ye'll be needed. Ye'll see tae it.*"

"*Aye*," I said. "*I'll see tae it.*"

He stood. He put his coat on. Outside, the Kellswater ran on in the dark.

"*Guid,*" he said.

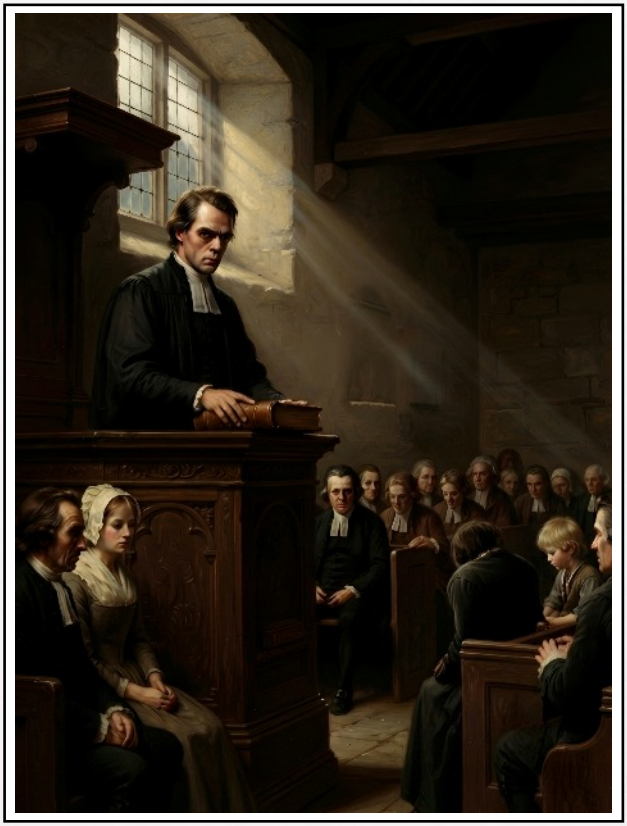
And went out into the evening, toward Dervock or Cloughmills or one of the other places that always needed him, holding the ground that he had held alone for six years and was about to place in other hands, trusting that the ground would hold.

But he was the first to hold it when it rested on one.

And that is not a small thing.

That is not a small thing at all.

I left for America in the autumn of '73 and I only saw him once again this side of eternity.



"Let us turn tae the word o' God," he said, in his ordinary voice, as though nothing had happened, or rather as though everything had happened and was now set aside so that the real work could begin." Page 89

CHAPTER FIVE

The Corpse in the House

County Antrim, Ulster — At Kirkhills Meetinghouse, November, 1762

William Anderson, elder

He had tried to stop him.

That was the thing William Anderson would carry longest — not the sermon itself, not the faces of the people during it, not even what happened at the end, but the moment beforehand, in the low room off the hall, when he had taken Martin by the arm and said, quietly, that no one would think less of him, that the people would understand, that there was no shame in a man being unable to stand in a pulpit on the day his wife lay dead in the little session room across the graveyard.

Martin had looked at him with those steady pale eyes.

"*They hae come,*" he said.

"*They can gang hame.*"

"*They hae come frae Ballymoney. They hae come frae Rasharkin. There's an oul wumman that walked fower mile in the frost.*" He paused. "T*hey hae come tae hear the word o' God, William. No tae hear aboot my trouble.*"

Anderson had no answer to that, because there was no answer, because the man was right in the way that occasionally made him difficult to love and impossible to dismiss. He released Martin's arm.

"*At least let me sit aside ye*," he said.

Martin considered this. Then: "*Aye. Sit whaur I can see ye.*"

They had found her three days ago.

Mary Martin, thirty-one years old, mother of three children of whom one daughter Nancy had lived, wife of eight years — found by her husband in the morning when the house was too quiet and the fire had not been made. Anderson did not know the details. He had not asked. He knew only that Martin had come to his door in the early dark, coatless in the November cold, and had stood on the step with the expression of a man on whom something very large and very permanent had fallen, and had said: "*She's awa*," in the voice of a man reporting a fact that his mind had not yet persuaded his body to believe.

Anderson had gone with him. He had done what needed doing — the child taken to the Stinsons, the widow sent for from the next farm to sit with the body, the elders notified. He had been an elder long enough to know that in the immediate face of loss the most useful thing is practical action, because practical action fills the hands and the hands, being filled, give the mind somewhere to put itself that is not directly in front of the thing that cannot be borne.

Martin had sat in the kitchen through most of it, not unhelpful but elsewhere — present in body and absent in the way of a man whose inner conversation was being conducted at a depth that left little surplus for the surface world. William's wife had brought him food twice. Both times it had sat untouched.

On the second day Martin had risen at four in the morning and written the funeral sermon. Anderson knew this because he had come at six and found the candle burned to nothing and the pages in order on the table and Martin in the chair beside them, asleep — or not asleep but something close to it, a state of

exhaustion so complete that it resembled sleep from the outside while having none of sleep's rest on the inside.

He had stood in the doorway and looked at the sleeping man and the pages on the table and felt — he was not a man who trusted feelings and so he noted this one carefully — felt something that he would not have been able to distinguish, in that moment, from reverence.

The meetinghouse was full.

Word had gone around, as word always went around in the townlands, with a speed that owed nothing to roads and everything to the close attention neighbours pay to one another's lives. They knew she was dead. They came anyway. Anderson, watching them file in from his position near the door, saw the particular quality of their faces — grave, careful, bearing the weight of people who are coming to receive something and are aware that the giving of it will cost the giver.

They sat without much noise.

The few children who were present behaved as children rarely do — quietly, absorbing the mood of their parents the way children absorb everything, through the skin, without being told.

Martin came in from the side door.

He was dressed properly, Anderson had not known who had seen to this and did not ask. His coat was dark and his collar clean, his hair had been combed. The Geneva gown was the one Mary had sown for his ordination and he walked to the pulpit with the measured step he always used, neither hurrying nor performing slowness, and climbed the three steps and stood behind the Bible and looked out at his congregation.

A long moment.

Anderson watched him from the front pew where he had positioned himself as promised, in Martin's line of sight. He watched the man look at the people, and the people look at the man, and the thing that passed between them in the silence was not pity — not precisely — though pity was an element. It was something more mutual. The people had not come to pity him. They had come because they belonged to him and he to them, in the Covenanting sense of that word, which was not sentimental but covenantal — bound, obligated, answerable — and whatever he was going to do in the next hour they intended to be present for it.

Martin opened his mouth.

He said: "*Let us worship God.*"

The Psalm was the twenty-third. Anderson had half-expected it and half-feared it would be something else — something harder, something that demanded more of the congregation — because Martin's instinct was always toward the demanding. But he chose the shepherd Psalm, and he gave out the line, and the people began to sing it in the old way, one voice, no instrument, rising in the low building until the rafters seemed to lean in toward the sound.

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.

He was singing with them. Anderson could see his lips moving. His face had changed when the singing began — not softened exactly, but opened, like a fist unclenching, and behind the opening was something Anderson was not prepared for, which was not grief but the thing beyond grief, the place grief takes you if you go all the way through it instead of around it.

The Psalm ended.

Martin prayed.

Anderson would not afterwards be able to reproduce the prayer exactly. It was long, as Martin's prayers always were — not from self-indulgence but from thoroughness, from the Covenanting conviction that God was to be addressed with the full weight of reality and not with pious summaries. He prayed for the congregation. He prayed for the sick among them by name — by name, Anderson thought, on this day, with his wife three days dead, the man was praying for the sick by name. He prayed for the persecuted churches in France and in the Palatinate. He prayed for the King, in the qualified way Covenanters prayed for kings who had not sworn the Covenant — asking God's mercy on a man who governed without acknowledging the proper sovereign of nations, which was Christ.

And then, near the end, his voice changed.

Not broke. It did not break. Anderson had been watching for the break, ready to stand if it came, ready to do something, though he could not have said what. But the voice did not break. It changed in a way that was harder to describe — grew quieter and more direct, the way a voice grows when a man has finished making speeches and is simply speaking — and Martin said:

"*Lord, thou hast taen frae me my helpmeet and my dear companion. Thou hast done it and thou art richteous and I will no contend wi' thee. But thou kens, Lord, what it is. Thou kens what a man is that maun gang forrit wi'oot the yin that walked aside him. Thou hast been the God o' thy servants in the desert places and I ask thee tae be that again noo, for I am in a desert place and I dinnae ken the wey through it, save that thou art the wey.*"

A silence.

Anderson became aware that he had been holding his breath. Around him he could hear the congregation breathing — the conscious, careful breathing of people trying to remain composed.

Martin raised his head.

"*Lat us turn tae the word o' God,*" he said, in his ordinary voice, as though nothing had happened, or rather as though everything had happened and was now set aside so that the real work could begin.

The text was from Job.

Of course it was from Job. Anderson, settling himself in the pew and reaching for his coat pocket where he kept a stub of pencil for noting the sermon head, thought: of course it is from Job, because the man cannot help himself, even now — even today — from choosing the hardest text.

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.

He preached it for an hour.

Anderson was a man of practical disposition who evaluated sermons the way he evaluated farm implements — by their function, by whether they did what they were supposed to do, by the results they produced in the world. By this measure he had heard many good sermons from Martin and several great ones and a handful he considered masterpieces, by which he meant not elegant constructions of language but moments when the distance between the word and the person hearing it was abolished, when the old words ceased to be old and became, for the duration of their speaking, the most alive thing in the room.

This was one of those.

It was not eloquent. That is the thing Anderson would struggle most to explain afterward, to those who had not been there and who assumed that the occasion must have produced a performance, something theatrical and emotionally heightened. It was not. It was almost plain. Martin stood in the pulpit and preached the text from Job with the directness of a man who had nothing left to protect — no reputation to manage, no weakness to conceal, no distance to maintain between the text and the life it was speaking to, because the life it was speaking to was his and it was entirely visible.

That was the thing. The visibility. A man stripped of all the ordinary insulation that people wrap around themselves in public — the performance of composure, the management of how one is perceived — and standing there anyway, not collapsed, not heroic, simply present, as the text was present, as the God the text pointed to was present, and preaching: *though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*

Anderson watched the congregation.

He had been watching congregations for thirty years. He knew the range of what could happen in a room when a good man preached a good sermon — the attention, the resistance, the occasional visible movement of the Spirit on a face, what the old folk called the *dew on the fleece*. He had seen all of it.

He had not seen this.

It moved through the room like weather. Not from front to back, not from the pulpit outward, but everywhere at once, the way temperature changes when a window is opened. He saw the elder from Ballylaggan, James Archibald, who was not a

man given to any outward expression, put his hand over his face. He saw a woman near the back — middle-aged, thick-handed, one of the farm wives from the Bann valley — begin to weep without making any attempt to stop. He saw the children, who had been restless, go still, not because they understood the words but because they understood the room, and the room had become a different kind of room.

He saw old men weeping.

In his experience old men did not weep in church. They had, by the time they reached old age, arrived at an accommodation with suffering that did not usually break open in public. But two of the oldest men in the congregation — both of them veterans of the worst years of the persecution, both of them men who had paid something real for their faith — were weeping in the open, without embarrassment, the way very old men sometimes weep at the end of their lives when the defences are thin and the distance between the present and everything that has mattered closes to nothing.

Martin did not see any of this.

He was in the text. That was the only way Anderson could describe it — the man was inside the text the way a man is inside a storm, entirely surrounded by it, the boundary between the preacher and what he preached dissolved, so that he was not explaining Job's suffering or illustrating it or applying it but inhabiting it, and through it — somehow, in the inexplicable way this sometimes happened — making it inhabitable by the people in front of him.

Yet will I trust in him.

Not because the trust was easy. Not because the loss was small. Not because death was a thing to be reframed and made acceptable by the right words said over it. But because there was, beneath the loss, beneath the desert place, beneath even the grief — a ground. A ground that did not depend on the things that had been taken from you because it had never depended on those things to begin with. A ground that held when everything built on it had fallen, precisely because it was not made of the things that fell.

This was the spiritual lesson and it was not an abstraction. It was in the room. It was what the room had become — a place where one man's encounter with the ground beneath grief was making the ground visible to two hundred other people, some of whom had not known it was there.

William Anderson sat with his hands in his lap and let the sermon come, and felt something happening in his own chest that he would not have called an experience of God if he had been writing a theological treatise but which, sitting in the pew on a November morning in a cold meetinghouse in Antrim with an old man weeping beside him, was the only honest name for it.

Martin closed with the Psalm.

The one hundred and second. Anderson knew it the moment he gave out the line — the Psalm of the man in affliction, the Psalm that goes down into the lowest place and finds, at the bottom of the lowest place, not comfort exactly but permanence:

Of old thou laid earth's deep foundations, the heavens are thy hand's work too. They all shall perish, thou dost last.

They sang it slowly. Martin gave out the line and sang with them, his great voice carrying the tune in the way it always did — not beautifully, he was not a beautiful singer, but with a weight and an authority that pulled the congregation into the melody the way a strong current pulls a boat.

When it ended the room was completely silent.

Martin stood in the pulpit for a moment. Then he descended the three steps with the same measured tread he had used to ascend them, and walked out through the side door, and was gone.

The congregation did not move for some time.

Anderson sat in the pew and looked at the place where Martin had stood and thought about what had just happened, which he knew he would be thinking about for the rest of his life, and not only because of the occasion but because of what the occasion had revealed — that this man, this difficult and serious and sometimes exasperating man who forgot to eat and chose the hardest texts and would not sit down when you told him to rest — that this man had something in him that was not his own, something that had been placed in him for the use of other people, and that the cost of carrying it was exactly as high as it appeared and that he was going to keep carrying it anyway.

Though He slay me.

Anderson rose. He walked to the side door and opened it and found Martin standing in the narrow passage between the meetinghouse and the wall, his back against the cold stone, his face turned up to the grey November sky, his eyes closed.

Anderson stood beside him.

Neither of them spoke.

After a while Martin said, without opening his eyes: "*Wus it ony use?*"

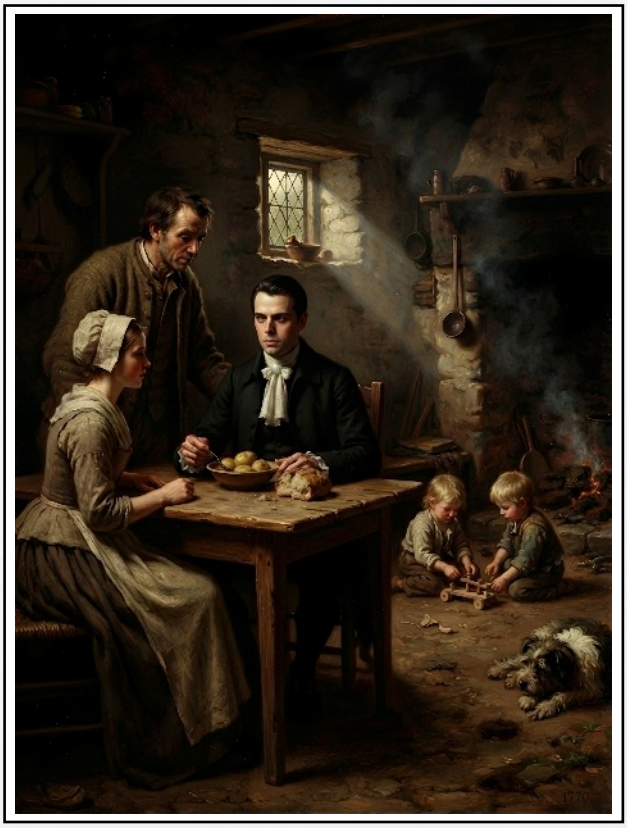
"*Aye,*" Anderson said. "*It wus.*"

A pause.

"*Guid.*" Martin said.

He opened his eyes. He looked at the sky for another moment — grey, indifferent, cold, the sky of Ulster in November which makes no promises and keeps none. Outside his wife's opened grave waited patiently, the burial was yet to come.

Then he went back inside the session room to be with his dead wife.



"Robert," Rev Martin said, "is awready persuaded. He cam tae me in February." Page 104

CHAPTER SIX

The Rents and the Reckoning

County Antrim, Ulster — 1771

Jean Stinson, congregant

The trouble began with the land, as trouble in Ulster always did, because in Ulster the land was never simply land — it was the argument, the old unresolved argument between the people who farmed it and the people who owned it and the people in London who owned the people who owned it, and the argument had been running since before Jean Stinson's grandmother was born and showed no sign of concluding before her grandchildren died.

The rents had gone up in the spring. This was not news — the rents went up as reliably as the Bann flooded, and with similar predictability, and the people bore it the way they bore the flooding, because there was nothing else to do. But this spring they had gone up by a third in a single notice, with no warning and no negotiation and no acknowledgment that the families farming these townlands had been farming them for three generations, had cleared the stones and drained the wet ground and built the walls and made something of land that had been wilderness when the first Martins and Stinsons and Andersons and Crawfords had arrived from Scotland.

Jean's husband Robert had come home from the agent's office in February with the notice in his hand and the expression he wore when the rage was too large for his face to contain and had gone flat instead, which she had learned to read as more dangerous than the rage that showed.

He had put the paper on the table.

She had read it.

"*Weel*," she had said.

"*Aye*," he had said.

They had sat in the kitchen in the February cold and looked at the number on the paper and done the arithmetic that the number required and arrived at the conclusion that the arithmetic produced, which was that they could not pay it and keep the children fed, and that if they could not pay it the holding reverted to the company, and that if the holding reverted to the landlord, they were standing on the road with their children and their furniture and the particular bewilderment of people who have worked hard and done nothing wrong and arrived nonetheless at ruin.

"*I'll speak tae Mr Martin*," Robert had said.

She had not asked what that would accomplish.

She had been in the congregation since before her marriage. Her father had brought her as a child to the field meetings and she had grown up with the Psalms in her mouth and the Westminster Shorter Catechism in her head and the Covenanting inheritance settled in her bones in the way that things you absorb before you can reason about them settle — below argument, below doubt, part of the structure of how the world is.

Rev Martin had been their minister for fifteen years.

She knew him the way you know a minister you have watched closely over a long time — not as an idea but as a man, with the

specificity that only proximity and time produce. She knew that he took his hat off in the house but left it on outdoors regardless of the weather, pulling it down in the rain as though he had forgotten it was there. She knew that he visited the sick reliably and the dying with something approaching joy, as though the deathbed were the place where the arguments resolved into something simpler. She knew that he had loved his first wife with the particular intensity of a man who does not distribute himself widely, and that since her death he had been — not diminished, she would not say diminished — but operating, perhaps, on something closer to the reserves than the surplus. His courtship of her sister in law Nancy Stinson was fruitless and her marriage to his elder the widower William Anderson maintained an awkwardness that was dispelled in America when Rev Martin saw that she had married a better man. Then Jenny Cherry threw her cap at Rev Martin, or so as the tongues wagged, but that she consistently wore a new bonnet in the front pew at Carnaughts was invisible to Rev Martin as he saw only precious souls before him and the eternities behind them. But that he in his single loneliness needed a mother for his orphaned daughter Nancy and agreed to the quiet nuptials administered by his friend Rev Matthew Lynn, who seemed to make a particular inquiry that she had her father's permission.

Jenny would not be long settled in the manse as Rev Martin's helpmeet when the following year they would leave all, or rather bring nearly all with them to another shore.

Jenny found out and Jean Stinson knew also, because everyone in the congregation knew it, that he had a temper.

Not a small man's temper, the kind that flares and fades and is mostly self-importance. A large man's temper, the kind con-

nected to his convictions, which meant it was aroused by injustice and not by inconvenience, and that once aroused it was very difficult to govern. She had seen it in the pulpit when he preached on the wicked shepherd and the scattered flock. She heard about the elder's meeting when the question of the absentee landlords came up and Rev Martin had said things about the Fishmongers' Company in London, and the profligate Earl of Donegall, that she was fairly certain were accurate and possibly actionable. But he could not condone the rural terror of the Peep 'O' Day boys, nor dismiss their motives. How carefully he steered his pulpit comments *for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.* She had seen it in his face when he had visited the Gillespies after their eviction, the raw expression of a man who has run out of words adequate to the anger and has not yet found the prayer adequate to it either.

Robert had spoken to him in March. She did not know the full of what was said. What she knew was that Rev Martin had listened for a long time — he was a good listener when he was not preaching, which surprised people who knew only the pulpit version of him — and had said very little, and that when Robert came home his face had lost the flat dangerous expression and had acquired instead a sort of grim resolution, which was different.

"*Whit did he say?*" she had asked.

"*He said the Lord sees the oppression o' the puir and he will answer it in his time and in his ain wey.*"

A pause.

"*And?*"

Robert had looked at the fire.

"*He said we shouldnae wait indefinitely.*"

The meeting was in April, in a barn at Dervock — the same barn, Jean thought, where the Society had met since before any of them were born, where Sandy Peden and David Houston preached and the old Covenanters mixed with refugees in the *killing times*. They had gathered in secret from the Synod of Ulster as much as from the King's magistrate and sung the Psalms by lantern light and passed the tradition from hand to hand like something fragile and irreplaceable.

There were perhaps eighty men. Some whose fathers were brought to the cause by David Houston's fiery words against the Regium Donum, which were portents of these dark days. She had not been invited but had come anyway, standing in the back with three other women who had also not been invited and had also come anyway, because the matter under discussion was the survival of their families and they were not going to wait outside a barn to hear about it second-hand.

Rev Martin was not present. This was noted. The meeting was an elder's meeting, properly speaking, with some of the tenant men from the surrounding townlands, and Rev Martin's absence was perhaps deliberate — the kind of deliberate absence that a minister arranges when he is aware that what is going to be said will be easier said without a minister present to have to ignore.

Robert Dunlop from Newtown-Limavady was speaking when they arrived. He was a large, slow-speaking man who chose his words with the care of someone aware that words, once re-

leased, cannot be recalled, and he was saying that the situation had become untenable and that the people of the congregation had a right — more than a right, an obligation, a duty that descended from the Covenant itself — to resist the oppression of their landlords by every lawful means available to them.

'*Lawful,*' Jean noted.

But the word that followed it, a few minutes later, in the mouth of a younger man she did not know from the Bann valley side, was not '*lawful.*'

She would not write down what was said. She would not repeat it. What she knew was that the meeting moved, in the space of perhaps two hours, from grievance to resolution, and that the resolution was of a nature that Dunlop's '*lawful*' did not quite cover, and that by the time they dispersed into the April dark the agreement was of a character that made her walk home beside Robert in silence, not from lack of things to say but from an excess of them.

At home she had said: "*It will no end weel.*"

"*It's endin badly noo*," Robert had said.

She had no answer to that, because it was true.

Three weeks later the agent was found dead on the Ballymoney road.

She did not know who had done it. She did not ask. It was the nature of the knowledge that then circulated through the back townlands — known by many and acknowledged by none, held in the shared silence of people who are implicated in something

by proximity and who have made a collective decision that the silence is the only remaining form of dignity.

The magistrates came. They asked questions. They received the answers that rural communities give magistrates in such circumstances, which are correct in their facts and uninformative in their substance, and they departed with nothing they had not arrived with.

Her own husband's cousin was with child when an agent came to seek the rent. Her husband John Beck, a giant of a man, struck the agent as if he was striking the Marquis himself. The man fell and his head fatally met the mounting block on the street outside. Beck fled and his wife and child died in the house from grief.

Rev Martin addressed these matters directly on the Sabbath, the "*time had come for action.*"

They would hear those words again.

Rev Martin came the following Sabbath. Not in public — not in the meetinghouse, not in the elder's meeting. He came to the house in the afternoon, sat in the kitchen where he had sat many times, accepted the meal she made, and said nothing for a considerable time.

She waited. She had learned, being in his congregation, the value of waiting.

Finally he said to Robert: "*I ken what happened.*"

"*Dae ye*," he said. Not a question.

"*I ken what happened,*" he said again, "a*nd I ken what drove it, and I am no gonnae pretend tae ye that what drove it wisnae real.*" He looked at his hands around the cup. "*But I want tae say tae ye, Robert* —

because I think ye are wise enough tae hear it — that this path disnae lead whaur folk think it leads. It leads tae the road. It leads tae the crossin. It leads tae somewhaur else."

Jean looked at him. "*Are ye sayin we should leave?*"

A long pause. "*I am sayin the Lord may be openin a door.*"

Jean thought about this. Outside, her children were in the yard, the oldest — twelve — corralling the younger two away from the well. She watched them through the window with the particular attention mothers give to children who do not know they are being watched.

"*America,*" he said.

"*There is ground there*," Rev Martin said. "*Real ground. Ground that could be owned.*" He said the word owned with a particular emphasis, as though it were a theological term, which in the Covenanting tradition, she supposed, it was — because the right of a man to the fruits of his labour was not a political opinion but a matter of created order, of the image of God in man and the dominion entrusted to him, and its violation was not merely an economic injustice but an offence against the structure of things as God had made them.

"*Ye've been thinkin aboot this for a while*," she said.

He looked slightly caught. "*A while.*"

She looked at the window. The oldest child had the youngest on her hip now and was walking across the yard toward the barn with the competent ease of a twelve-year-old who has been carrying smaller siblings since she was eight.

"*Robert will need persuadin,*" she said.

"*Robert*," Rev Martin said, "i*s awready persuaded. He cam tae me in February*."

Robert looked at his wife consenting to the minister's exposure of the deep unspoken things that had burdened him for months and now as the revelation came, so the light shone on plans already formed in his mind.

Jean set her pot down and looked at her minister. "*Afore the agent*."

"*Afore the agent*."

A silence in the kitchen that had its own weight, its own furniture.

"*Weel,*" she said, at length.

"*Aye*," he said.

The last sermon before the emigration was preached in the open air.

Rev Martin had chosen the Round Hole at Laymore on a Sabbath in late August, the green of the year turning drab and weary anticipating the drab of October. There were perhaps three hundred people — not all of them emigrating, many coming simply to hear, because word had gone around that this was a sermon worth hearing, and in the country the appetite for a good sermon was not much less than the appetite for food.

Jean stood with Robert and the children. Her trunk was already packed, the crops sold in the barn and in the field. The horse and plough left for the new tenant, no doubt with racked rent. The five ships had been chartered and twelve hundred souls had pledged their faith in providence to shake the dust of the

Nova Scotia the *New Scotland* of their forefathers here for the new land of the ancient continent of America. Their chartered ship, the Lord Dunluce was still at sea and they would board it in month of September, as the Lord willed. The James and Mary presently in Larne Lough was to leave on the 25th.

Rev Martin preached on Joshua. On the command to possess the land — not with violence, he was careful here, in a way that might have been directed at the young men from the Bann valley who were also present — but with the confidence of a people who had been told by God that there was a place for them and that the journey toward it was not abandonment but obedience.

He spoke of what they were leaving. He did not minimise it. He spoke of the graves — the fathers and mothers and children buried in Irish ground, the parents too frail or fearful to travel and the ground that would belong to someone else's family now, the ground that held the remains of everything that had come before them here. He spoke of the old women and old men who could not make the crossing and who stood in the congregation with the faces of people saying goodbye to more than a minister — saying goodbye to the last generation that remembered the first generation, saying goodbye to the living connection to a history that would now have to be carried entirely in memory.

He said: "*The Lord that led Israel through the wilderness is the same Lord in the Carolina back country. He disnae diminish wi' distance. He is no a God o' one shore.* "

Jean felt Robert's hand find hers.

She thought of her grandmother's stories of the crossing from Scotland — the cold and the fear and the land appearing out of

the mist like a promise being kept after a long delay. She thought of what it meant to be a people who were always crossing, always in between, always on the water between one shore and the next. She thought that perhaps this was not misfortune but vocation — that the Covenanters had been made by their history into a people of the crossing, people who knew by long practice that home was not a place you were given but a place you built, stone by stone, on whatever ground the Covenant God provided.

She was not certain she believed this.

She was certain she needed to.

The Psalm at the close was the one hundred and twenty-first. *I to the hills will lift mine eyes.*

They lifted their eyes east, to the purple hills of Glenwherry, the refuge of Sandy Peden a century ago. They sang it slowly, three hundred voices on a hillside, into the September air that was already carrying the first chill of the coming autumn.

Behind them, Ulster, no longer a refuge.

Before them, the ocean.

"She did not cry until the ship moved." Page 110

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Gathering and The Journeying

Larne Lough — October, 1772

Nancy Martin, his daughter, aged sixteen

She did not cry until the ship moved.

Nancy Martin had made herself a private promise about this — that she would not cry in front of the congregation, not during the farewell sermons, not during the evening of prayer that had gone on until well past midnight in the Andersons' barn with old people kneeling on the cold floor and young people standing because there was not enough room for everyone to kneel, not during any of the long succession of goodbyes that had occupied the previous three weeks in a parade of embraces and pressed hands and faces that people held very still when they did not want you to see what was in them.

She had managed it. She had stood beside her father during all of it with the composed face she had learned, at his side, over the sixteen years of being a minister's daughter — the face that said: I am here, I am steady, I am not going to require comfort because there is not enough comfort to go around and other people need it more than I do. She felt he drew strength from her rather than her new mother Jenny, well intentioned, but inexperienced in a minister's home. She had held younger children during the long prayer meeting. She had helped Nancy Anderson distribute the food. She had said goodbye to her grandmother — her mother's mother, too old to cross — with the grip of someone who understands that this is the last time, though she did not say this and her grandmother did not say it

and the understanding sat between them anyway, fully furnished.

She had not cried.

Then the ship moved.

It was not the movement itself — not the lurch of the hull away from the dock, not the creak of the rigging, not the slow widening of the gap between the Lord Dunluce and the stone of the Larne quay. It was the angle. The angle at which Ulster began, slowly, to become a shape — to shrink from a country full of specific things, specific people, specific patches of ground where specific things had happened, and become a line, a dark line against the sky blending grey into the sodden Antrim hills, and then less than a line, a suggestion, a memory of a line. The long delays meant they moved out into October storms, the other ships bearing those burdened with hopeful sorrow, where already scattered across the Atlantic passage to Charleston.

That was when she cried.

She was standing at the rail and she turned her back on the shore and faced the ship — the impossibly crowded deck, over 400, finding impossible corners above and below to make home for the coming weeks. They were mostly Covenanters, the trunks and crates and children and animals and people whose faces she half knew from the congregation and the neighbouring townlands — and cried in the private way she had learned, without sound, just the tears running, which she was aware looked like cold-weather eye-watering if you were not looking closely and she had positioned herself so that no one was looking closely.

Her father was at the stern, still facing Ireland and in communion with the one who knew the secrets of the deep.

She made solemn psalmody in her heart assured in the bond with her father's soul that he heard her singing in silent melody and was preparing a discourse for those 'reeling days in the ocean'

And let them sacrifice to him
off 'rings of thankfulness;
And let them shew abroad his works
in songs of joyfulness.

Who go to sea in ships, and in
great waters trading be,
Within the deep these men God's works
and his great wonders see.

For he commands, and forth in haste
the stormy tempest flies,
Which makes the sea with rolling waves
aloft to swell and rise.

They mount to heav'n, then to the depths
they do go down again;
Their soul doth faint and melt away
with trouble and with pain.

They reel and stagger like one drunk,
at their wit's end they be:
Then they to God in trouble cry,
who them from straits doth free.

She watched him from across the crowded deck. He was standing very still, his hat in his hands — he had taken it off, she noticed, the way he took it off inside but never outside, and this small inversion of his habit told her more than she wanted to know about what was happening in him. His head was bowed. He might have been praying. He might have been simply looking. The distinction, with him, was not always clear.

She thought: he has given these people his whole life and now he is giving them the rest of it. She thought: I do not know if he has counted the cost of that or whether counting it would matter.

She thought, with the unfair clarity that sixteen can sometimes produce: I would like, just once, to come first. There was now his Jenny between them.

She did not say this. She had never said it and would not say it and by the time she was old enough to have the words for the complexity of what she felt, she would also be old enough to understand that the feeling and the life were not in contradiction, that you can love a man and also mourn what his greatness required of the people around him. She would not have the words for any of this for many years.

Right now she had only the tears, running in the cold, and the shrinking line of Ireland, and the crowded deck behind her, and

her father at the stern with his hat in his hands, facing something she could not see.

Below decks was not to be thought about.

Nancy had been below three times in the first two days and had come up each time not quite sick but with the knowledge of what sickness was very available to her body and had spent the rest of each day at the rail with the wind on her face thinking carefully about the horizon. The horizon helped. It was stable. Everything else on the ship was in motion — the deck, the horizon of the water, the walls of the hold, the interior of her own stomach — but the true horizon, the line where sea became sky, held still.

She had made herself useful instead of sick, which she had found was usually the better option.

There were children. Twelve families from the Kellswater congregation, with children ranging from a nursing infant — the Murray baby, who had been born in August and whom Nancy considered too new for an Atlantic crossing but whose opinion on the matter had not been sought — up to boys of fourteen and fifteen who were managing, with variable success, to conceal their terror beneath an exaggerated contempt for the whole proceedings.

She took the children in hand.

She had a gift for this that she had not known she had, because at home there had not been enough children to require a gift. But here, in the confined and chaotic space of a ship carrying far more passengers than it was designed for, the gift became apparent. She could make a small child stop crying without

knowing quite how she did it. She could produce games from nothing — a piece of rope, a button, two minutes of complete attention — and sustain them long enough to take the edge off a tantrum or a fear. She could sing, which she had from her father, though without his authority and with considerably more lightness, and she sang the Psalms for the children in a way that was not church and not school but something in between, the tunes stripped of their weight and made playful, so that the children were learning them without knowing they were learning anything.

The Murray baby slept in her arms one afternoon while the mother, exhausted past the point where rest was possible, sat against the hull and stared at nothing.

Nancy sat on a coil of rope in the waist of the ship and held the sleeping infant and felt the Atlantic moving under her and thought: we are crossing. We are in the middle. Behind us is what we were. Before us is what we will be. And here in the middle, in the between-place, is this child who was born too recently to know that she has already left the world she was born into and is being carried toward one she has never seen.

What would the child remember?

Nothing. She would remember nothing of this crossing. She would grow up in Carolina and speak of herself as American and the Ulster would be in her blood and in the Psalms her parents had taught her and in the shape of her face, but the crossing itself — the weeks of water, the wind, the particular light on the Atlantic in October — would be gone. She would have been carried through it in someone else's arms and would arrive on the other side with no memory of the passage.

Nancy thought: *is that mercy or loss?*

She could not decide.

On the third Sabbath her father preached on deck.

The weather had permitted it, barely — there was a wind but it was steady and the sea was moderate and someone had lashed a crate to the forward mast to serve as a pulpit and the congregation gathered as best they could, holding to ropes and rails, the children pressed against adults, the sound of the water and the rigging always present beneath the voice.

He preached the forty-sixth Psalm. God is our refuge and our strength.

Nancy stood with her back to the mast and watched the faces.

She had been watching faces all her life — it was, perhaps, the occupational inheritance of a minister's daughter, this habit of attention to how people receive what they are given. She had watched faces in the meetinghouse in Carnaughts in the good years and the hard years and in that extraordinary November Sabbath when her father had preached the day her mother lay dead and the old men had wept and she, six at the time, had stood in the back and watched and tried to understand what she was witnessing.

The faces on deck were different.

They were the faces of people in the middle of their lives. Not at the beginning, not at the end, but suspended in the crossing, in the between-place, with everything they had known behind them and everything they would make ahead of them and nothing around them but water. The certainties that had seemed fixed — the particular field, the particular lane, the particular graveyard where the particular dead lay — had been

given away and the certainties that would replace them had not yet arrived. There was nothing to stand on but the ship and the Psalm and the voice of the man who had led them here.

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Nancy watched an old woman — she was perhaps sixty-five, from Cullybackey, whose name Nancy had forgotten — watching her father preach. The old woman's face had on it an expression that Nancy had seen only a few times in her life and always in the same kind of moment: an expression of someone who is frightened and comforted simultaneously, with no resolution between the two, holding both at once the way you hold two things that are too heavy to hold separately but that, combined, somehow balance.

The Lord of hosts is with us; *the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

The ship rolled.

Three of the children, by some collective instinct, moved closer to the adults nearest them and were absorbed without comment.

Her father's voice carried over the water with the particular authority she had grown up with but never quite ceased to be surprised by — the authority not of volume but of conviction, the authority of a man who is saying what he believes so completely that the belief and the saying are one thing, not a performance but a disclosure, the truth of a man's inner life made available to the people around him.

She thought: *this is whit he wis made for.*

She thought: *it costs him everything.*

She thought: *he daes it onyroad.*

The Psalm at the close was the same one — they sang it back to him, the congregation, the words returning to the source, in the wind above the Atlantic:

God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble.

The ship moved through the water.

The horizon, as always, held still.

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." Page 129

CHAPTER EIGHT

Eleven Weeks and Contrary Winds

The Atlantic Ocean — October–December, 1772

Captain James Gillis, Captain of The Lord Dunluce

He had carried cargo from Belfast to Charleston seventeen times.

Timber, mostly. Flax. Linen. Once, memorably, a consignment of Irish Creamware pottery packed in straw that had somehow survived six weeks of Atlantic weather without a single piece broken, which Gillis had taken as evidence either of divine providence or of the superiority of Irish straw, and had never fully resolved between the two. He had carried indentured servants, twice — a transaction he had not enjoyed and had not repeated, not from any scruple he could have articulated in the language of theology but from the practical observation that a man who does not want to be where he is makes a poor shipmate and a dangerous one when the weather turns.

Even as a Scotsman he had never carried four hundred Presbyterians.

He had not known, when he agreed to the charter, quite what he was agreeing to. He had known the number — four hundred and seven souls, adults and children, with their trunks and crates and the particular accumulation of objects that people bring when they are leaving forever rather than for a season. He had known the duration — six weeks, perhaps eight, depending on the winds, which were always depending on the winds. He had known the minister's name: Martin, William, Reverend, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, age forty-three, a large man

with a steady gaze who had come aboard at Larne Lough in October with a Bible under his arm and had shaken Gillis's hand with the grip of a man who has decided to trust you and intends to hold you to it.

What he had not known was that four hundred and seven Presbyterians constituted not merely a passenger manifest but a community — a thing with a centre of gravity, a set of internal obligations, a history and a structure and a way of being in the world that did not pause for the Atlantic Ocean. They did not simply occupy the ship. They inhabited it, in the way that people inhabit places they intend to make their own, arranging themselves with purposefulness that Gillis found both admirable and, in the first days, slightly alarming.

By the end of the first week he had stopped being alarmed. By the end of the second he had come to find it — though he would not have said this aloud, not being a man who said things aloud that did not require saying — quietly extraordinary.

The weather hit on the fifth day.

Gillis had seen worse, considerably worse, but not with four hundred souls below decks. The storm came from the north-west with the particular bad temper of an October Atlantic storm, which is not the drama of a tropical hurricane but the grinding, relentless, day-after-day brutality of a high-latitude gale — grey seas of fifteen, twenty feet, the wind a constant low roar in the rigging, the ship working in the swell with the deep structural groaning of a 400 ton vessel doing what it was built to do and resenting it.

Below decks it was dark and wet and loud with human misery.

Gillis went down on the second day of the storm. He did not usually go below — his place was on deck, where the actual navigation of the ship required his attention — but the situation required a survey, and he was not a man who delegated surveys of things he needed to understand.

The hold had been divided by rough partitions into family areas. It smelled of bilge and bodies and the particular staleness of air that has been breathed too many times and not replaced. In the lamplight — they were rationing lamp oil — he could see the people in their compartments, some prone, some sitting, all of them in the state of enforced intimacy that small spaces produce, the private made public, the family's interior life conducted in full view of three neighbouring families.

He walked the length of the hold.

What he had expected: misery. Weeping. The prostration of people in the grip of seasickness, which is one of the few forms of suffering that removes entirely the sufferer's capacity for dignity or philosophy.

What he found: all of this, yes. But also — and this was the thing he turned over in his mind afterward, in the night watches on deck when the ship ran before the wind and there was nothing to do but hold the course and think — also something else. In one compartment a man was reading aloud from the Bible to his family, a steady drone of scripture barely audible above the storm, and his wife was lying with her eyes closed and her lips moving in what might have been response or might have been her own parallel prayer, the two streams of devotion running side by side in the dark. In another, two women had organised the children of four families into a game that required no space and produced, improbably, occasional laughter. In a

third, an old man was asleep — genuinely asleep, breathing with the deep regularity of a man at peace, in a ship in a storm in the Atlantic, which Gillis found so remarkable that he paused to look at him twice to be sure.

He found Martin amidships.

The minister was not sick. This was, Gillis would decide later, either a physical grace or an act of will so complete it had ceased to be distinguishable from physical grace. He was sitting on a trunk with his back to the hull and a lantern beside him, and he was talking to a young mother — nineteen, twenty, her face white-green with sickness and fear — and what Gillis could hear of what Martin was saying was not comfort in the reassuring sense, not you'll be fine and it will pass, but something more honest than that, something that acknowledged the full reality of the situation and then went somewhere with it. He could not hear the whole of it. He heard: the deep is His, and He made it. He heard: fear is not the same as faithlessness. He heard the young woman's breathing change.

Martin looked up as Gillis passed. Nodded once. Returned to the young woman.

Gillis went back to his deck.

The smallpox arrived in the third week.

He had feared it from the beginning — the dread of every captain who carried passengers, the disease that moved through a closed population with a speed and thoroughness that made all other dangers seem manageable by comparison. He had quarantined the ship's stores. He had insisted on the twice-daily airing of the hold, weather permitting. He had made clear to the

ship's surgeon, a Glasgow man named Robertson who drank less than most ship's surgeons and knew more, that this was to be his primary concern.

The first case was a boy of seven named James Thomson.

He had been unwell for two days before anyone identified it — in the crowded hold, in the aftermath of the storm, with half the ship's complement in some state of nausea or exhaustion, unwell was a description that covered too many people to be alarming. But the fever rose, and on the third day the marks appeared, and Robertson came to Gillis on the deck at six in the morning with the face of a man delivering a verdict.

"*How bad*?" Gillis asked.

"*We'll ken in a week*."

He told Martin that afternoon. He owed him that. He found him on deck, the weather having eased to something merely unpleasant, standing at the rail with his face to the west — always west, Gillis had noticed, the minister faced west when he was on deck, as though maintaining a constant orientation toward the destination by sheer force of attention.

"*One confirmed*," Gillis said. "*Mebbe twa or three ithers we're watchin*."

Martin turned from the rail. His face did not change in the way that faces change with panic — no widening of the eyes, no whitening. Something moved in it, something deep and controlled.

"*The Thomson boy*," he said.

"*Aye*."

A silence. The ship moved. The rigging sang its constant note.

"*What dae ye need frae me?*" Martin asked.

Gillis had been a captain for twenty years and had been asked many things in many situations and this was not the usual question. The usual question was: what will you do? Or: can you promise us?—Or simply the silence of people waiting for a professional to manage a situation that was beyond them.

He had not been asked: what do you need from me?

"*Keep them calm*," he said. "*Keep them prayin. Keep the weans awa frae the sick.*"

Martin nodded. "*I'll need tae visit the sick.*"

"*I cannae recommend—*"

"*I ken. I'll visit them onyway.*"

Gillis looked at him. He was, by his own accounting, not a religious man — he observed the formalities, he attended church when in port in ports where churches existed and were convenient, he had a general understanding with the Almighty that consisted largely of gratitude in good weather and urgency in bad. He had no theological framework for what he was looking at.

What he saw was a man who had already made his calculation and was now simply living out its conclusions. The calculation was not difficult to reconstruct: these people were his responsibility in a way that superseded his physical safety, and that fact had consequences, and the consequences were not subject to renegotiation.

"*Aye*," Gillis said. "*Visit them.*"

Three died.

The Thomson boy lasted four days after the first marks appeared, the fever rising past the point where Robertson's remedies could do anything but make the dying more bearable, and then he was gone. His mother held him past the point of Robertson's gentle attempts to take him, and Martin sat beside her through the night, not speaking, not praying aloud, just present, which was all that was possible and which was, Gillis noted from the doorway, apparently enough.

Two others — an old man from Aghadowey named Fleming, a relation of an elder from Kirkhills, who had perhaps been dying before he boarded and whom the crossing finished, and a woman of thirty-five whose name Gillis had not had occasion to learn before she was gone. Three burials at sea, in as many weeks. Three bodies committed to the Atlantic. Three times Martin stood at the rail and read the burial service and then stood there after the reading, with the silence of the ocean around them, and did not hurry away.

The congregation bore it.

This was the thing that struck Gillis most. Not the dying — dying was a thing ships knew, a built-in cost of long passages, accounted for in the actuarial calculations of the charter companies. What struck him was the way four hundred and four people bore three deaths in the middle of an ocean far from everything they had known, with others in ships of this great project, far flung on the uncompassionate ocean and bore it without breaking, without the dissolution into pure fear that he had seen in other passages when the odds shifted badly.

They bore it, he thought, because they were not alone in it. Not merely in the sense of being physically surrounded by others — though that was not nothing — but in a more particular sense,

in the sense of a community that had been built, over generations, for exactly this. For the desert place. For the crossing. For the in-between where the old ground was gone and the new ground had not arrived. They had been built for it by the history they carried, the history of Covenanters who had been driven from their land and had crossed water and had built again and had been driven again and had crossed again, and who had learned, in the hard school of that repeated experience, that the ground beneath a man was not the physical ground of any particular country but something else, something carried rather than stood upon.

He did not have the language for what he was observing.

He had the observation.

The fourth Sabbath was the one he would remember.

The weather had cleared overnight — one of those Atlantic reversals that happen without warning, the swell dropping, the wind shifting to the south, the clouds pulling back to reveal a sky of such improbable blue that it seemed designed as a rebuke to the previous three weeks. Gillis came on deck at five in the morning and stood in the sudden stillness and felt the specific relief of a seaman released from labour — not rest exactly, but the lifting of a pressure that you have been so long under that you have ceased to be aware of it as pressure until it is gone.

Martin was already on deck.

He was standing at the bow with his face to the east — east, not west, which was unusual — and Gillis understood after a moment that he was watching the sunrise. It was coming up over the horizon with the extravagance of Atlantic sunrises, the

sky layering itself from dark to gold to the particular burning orange that only happens at sea, where there is nothing between you and the light to interrupt it.

Gillis stood beside him. Neither of them spoke.

The sun came up.

At nine Martin preached. He had no crate this time — the deck had been cleared and the congregation gathered in the waist of the ship, sitting on coiled rope and upturned tubs and each other, children in laps and old people against the rail, and the sky above them that improbable blue, and the sea calm enough that you could believe, if you wanted to believe it, that it had always been calm, that the three weeks of storm had been something else's story.

He preached the one hundred and seventh Psalm.

They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters — these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.

Gillis was at the wheel. He was close enough to hear. He told himself, as he always told himself in such moments, that he was listening from duty — from the professional obligation of knowing what was happening on his ship. He was aware this was not entirely accurate.

The Psalm was not comfortable. It was not a sermon of reassurance. It went into the storm — the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof, they mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths, their soul is melted because of trouble — and it did not flinch from the storm or ask the congregation to pretend that the last three weeks had been other than they were. Four people were now dead. The Murray baby had died. The Thomson boy. The old man Fleming was

gone. The woman of thirty-five whose name Gillis had now learned was Margaret Wilson was committed to the sea.

Martin named them. He spoke their names slowly, in the open air, with the Atlantic around them.

He said that God had seen them. He said that God had held them. He said that the deep was God's deep and the dead were not lost to it but held by the one who held the deep.

And then he said something that made Gillis, at the wheel, become very still.

He said: "*I hae buried my wife and I hae stood ower weans and I hae sailed three week in a storm and I want tae say tae ye, as plainly as I ken how tae say onything, that God is no absent frae the warst places. He is maist present in the warst places. No because He sends the warst places — I will no say that, I dinnae believe that, sufferin is no a lesson plan. But because the warst places are whaur the insufficient things fall away. The false floors gie oot. And what is underneath the false floors is — not nothin.*"

He stopped. The ship moved. Somewhere a rope tapped against the mast.

"*What is underneath*," he said, "*is the Lord o' hosts. The God o' Jacob. The God that wis in the burnin bush and the pillar o' cloud and the valley o' dry banes and the cross — especially the cross — the God that is maist fully kent no in the places o' comfort but in the places o' extremity, because thae are the places whaur He cannae be confused wi' comfort itself.*"

Gillis held the wheel.

The congregation was very quiet.

"*We will arrive*," Martin said. "*I believe we will arrive. But even if we dae not — even if this ship goes doon and we are aw committed tae this*

deep — we are no ootside the haund o' God. There is nae ootside. There is nae beyond. There is nae place, in the sea or in the ground or in the dark, whaur the God o' Jacob hasnae been afore us and disnae wait."

He gave out the Psalm. The singing rose from the deck of the Lord Dunluce into the blue Atlantic morning, voices thin and strong and braided with grief and something that was not grief but lived directly alongside it:

He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.

Gillis's lips were moving.

He noticed this some seconds after it had begun and was briefly surprised and then was not, because in the particular silence of the Atlantic on that morning, in the aftermath of the storm and the deaths and the weeks of fear, the words were simply the words — not someone else's theology but the bare description of what had happened, what was happening, and what he found himself, against most of his previous habits of mind, inclined to believe would continue to happen.

He held the wheel.

The ship moved west.

They raised the American coast on the seventy-third day.

It appeared first as a smell — the smell of land, pine and earth and something warmer than Atlantic air, a smell that moved through the ship with a speed that had nothing to do with wind because it was not carried on the wind but passed from person to person, one waking another, the word moving below decks

— land — in the way that single words move through crowds when they are the right word at the right moment.

Gillis was on deck. Of course he was on deck. He was always on deck when a crossing resolved itself, because in his experience the end of a long passage was the most dangerous moment — the relaxation of vigilance, the distraction of relief, the hundred small errors that fatigue and celebration made possible.

But he also wanted to see their faces.

He was not sentimental. He had been at sea for thirty years and had crossed the Atlantic nine times and had delivered passengers to Charleston and to Philadelphia and once to New York and had watched them go down the gangway with the walk of people relearning the stability of solid ground, and he had registered this as the conclusion of a business transaction and sailed back to Belfast.

He wanted to see these faces.

Martin was at the bow. He had been there for an hour, since the smell had reached the deck, standing with his hands on the rail and his face to the west and the new world building itself, brown and green, out of the horizon.

Gillis came to stand beside him.

For a long time neither of them spoke. The coast came closer. You could see the line of the trees now — the great dark pines of the Carolina coast, different from anything in Ulster, a different scale entirely, the forest running unbroken from the waterline to a horizon that seemed further away than European horizons, as though the continent were demonstrating its scale as a matter of principle.

"*Seventy-three days*," Gillis said.

"*Aye.*"

"*Ye'll no be glad tae see the last o' me.*"

Martin turned from the rail. He looked at Gillis with the direct grey eyes that had been looking at Gillis, Gillis felt, with steadily increasing penetration across seven weeks of close quarters.

"*I'll be glad tae see the last o' yer ship,*" Martin said. "*No o' you.*"

Gillis absorbed this. He was not a man who received personal statements easily. He preferred the transactional, the practical, the domain of what could be measured and navigated.

"*The Murray woman,*" he said.

"*She'll be cared for.*"

"*Aye. I ken that. I only—*" He stopped. He was not sure what he had only. He had delivered four hundred and three people alive to the American coast, which was the contractual obligation, and the four who had not arrived were the Atlantic's business and not his, and this was the accounting that a man in his position was required to make and mostly succeeded in making and occasionally, in the night watches, did not.

Martin said: "*Ye did weel by us.*"

"*It's my job.*"

"*Aye. An ye did it weel.*" A pause. "*That's no a smaa thing. I'll write the usual letter marking oor arrival and ye can carry it hame to the folk.*"

They arrived on Sabbath December 20.

The coast was close now. Gillis could see the sandbars — the treacherous Carolina sandbars that had taken more than one ship that thought itself safely arrived. He would need to concentrate.

"*There's a pilot comes oot frae Sullivan's Island,*" he said.

"*I ken.*"

"*Ye've read aboot it.*"

"*I've read everythin I could find.*" A slight pause. "*For twa year.*"

Gillis looked at him. Forty-three years old, large hands on the rail, grey beginning at the temples, the face of a man who has spent twenty years being responsible for other people and has arrived at whatever lies on the other side of that — not ease exactly, but a kind of settled authority, the authority of a man who has been tested in the specific ways that matter to him and has not, in the most important moments, failed.

He thought: *I would not want to fail this man.*

He was not sure where the thought came from. He set it aside.

"*We'll anchor aff Sullivan's Island for the quarantine,*" he said. "*Ten days, mebbe twa week.*"

"*I ken.*"

"*Yer folk will find it hard.*"

Martin looked back at the coast. At the dark pine shore. At the new world presenting itself in its enormous vegetable abundance, indifferent to the smallness of the human drama being enacted in the water before it.

"*They hae found everythin hard,*" he said. "*They will find this hard. An then we will gang ashore.*"

He said it the way he said most things — as a simple statement of what was going to happen, with no particular drama attached to it, as though the drama were a thing that happened in lesser narratives and this was something else, something that simply

proceeded, step by step, toward whatever the Lord had ordained.

Gillis went to his wheel.

The pilot boat was coming out from the island.

The Lord Dunluce moved toward the shore.

"The road north was one hundred and fifty miles of what the locals called a road and what Martin would have called, in Ulster, a suggestion." Page 143

CHAPTER NINE

Canaan at Last

Sullivan's Island & Rocky Creek, South Carolina — January, 1773

Reverend William Martin

The quarantine island smelled of salt marsh and pine resin and the particular warm rot of a southern winter, which was not like any winter he had known and which his body, after seventy-seven days of Atlantic cold, received with the bewildered gratitude of a man handed something he had not known he needed.

He stood on Sullivan's Island in January and breathed the air of America and felt — what?

Not triumph. He had never been susceptible to triumph, which was a feeling suited to men whose primary concern was their own advancement and who confused the advancement of the cause with the advancement of themselves. What he felt was more difficult to name. Something that had to do with the specific quality of the light — a winter light, yes, but not the grey-under-cloud light of Ulster in January, a different light, cleaner, lower, coming across the water of the harbour with a directness that Ulster skies rarely permitted. Something that had to do with the smell of the pines, which were not Irish pines, not Scots pines, but something altogether larger and more various and more alive.

Something that had to do with what had been given up to arrive here.

He stood on the island and said the morning prayer and gave thanks, and the thanks was not easy because it came freighted with everything it had cost — the graves in Ulster ground, the old woman he had left weeping on the dock, his mother-in-law's face, the Murray baby committed to the sea at three weeks of age, the Thomson boy, Margaret Wilson, old man Fleming, seventy-three days of fear and prayer and the specific loneliness of a leader who cannot show the full extent of his fear to the people he is leading because the fear is contagious and the leadership is not.

He gave thanks anyway.

This was not hypocrisy. It was what he had preached on the ship and in Ulster for twenty years and would preach until he could not stand: that gratitude was not a feeling you waited for but a discipline you practised, that it was the act of placing yourself, again and again, in right relation to the God who had made you and sustained you and brought you to this marsh-smelling island in January, and that the placing was an act of will that preceded the feeling and sometimes, if you persisted, produced it.

He was not sure, on Sullivan's Island, that he had the feeling.

He had the practice.

The quarantine lasted fifteen days.

He had known it would be tedious and it was. The island was flat and sandy and covered with the scrubby palmettos that seemed to be the primary vegetation of the Carolina coast, and the people were confined to a cleared area near the shore and had the freedom of that area and no more, and after seventy-

three days of a ship's deck the freedom of a flat sandy island felt like an ironic gift.

He preached every morning and every evening.

He visited the sick — there were always sick, there had been sick since before Belfast, and the crossing had added to their number without creating catastrophe, which he had accepted with profound relief and a private awareness that it could easily have been otherwise. He sat with the old and the frightened. He arbitrated the disputes that confinement and proximity and accumulated stress produced between people who would have managed their differences easily on their own ground and managed them badly here, crowded together on a sand island, waiting.

He also, when he could, simply walked.

This was a new habit, or rather the recovery of an old one that the responsibilities of ministry had gradually suppressed. In the early years in Ulster he had walked the countryside between meetings with a freedom that was partly physical necessity — he had no horse in the first years, he walked everywhere — and partly the simple pleasure of a man whose mind worked better in motion. The responsibilities had accumulated and the walking had reduced to purposeful movement between one obligation and the next.

Here, on the island, he walked.

He walked to the south end where the palmetto trees grew thick and the marsh began, and he sat on a fallen trunk and looked at the marsh grass bending in the mild January wind, the birds he did not know — grey, long-legged, standing in the shallows with the patience of creatures that had never had a

crossing to make, who simply stood in the water and waited for what the water brought.

He thought about what came next.

He had read everything available about the Carolina back country — the letters of the Irish settlers already there, the accounts of travellers, the land agent's reports that an elder in Belfast had obtained for him two years before the crossing and which he had read so many times that he could reconstruct them in his mind with near-perfect accuracy. He knew the distances: a hundred and fifty miles inland from Charleston, through the low country and the sandhill country and up into the piedmont where the creeks ran fast over rock and the land rose toward the Blue Ridge. He knew the names: Rocky Creek, Fair Forest, Fishing Creek. He knew there were people there already — Scots-Irish settlers who had come down the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania, who were building a society in the back country that was rough and hard and occasionally violent and desperately in need of what he had come to bring.

What he had come to bring: the word of God and the Covenanting inheritance and the order of discipline and worship that the Reformed Presbyterian tradition had maintained across a century of persecution and dispersal. Not a comfortable inheritance. Not a soft gospel. The hard thing, the demanding thing, the thing that asked everything of the people who received it.

He believed they were ready for it.

He believed they were, in fact, starving for it.

They left the island on a Thursday morning, moving across the harbour to Charleston in the pilot's flat-bottomed boats, and

Martin stood in the bow of the first boat and watched the Carolina shore come toward him in the winter sunshine, the palmetto-lined waterfront, the white buildings of the city, the extraordinary improbable abundance of it all — the market stalls, the horses, the smells of coffee and spice and the particular southern smell that was partly tide and partly flowers and partly a warmth that Ulster had no equivalent for.

They walked through Charleston in a straggling procession — four hundred people with their trunks and crates and children and the accumulated possessions of people who have tried to bring their lives with them — and the city looked at them with the benevolent curiosity of a place accustomed to looking at new arrivals and had nothing in particular to say about them.

Martin bought a horse and a wagon, both sorry examples of the skill of this new land.

This was more difficult than it should have been and less difficult than he had feared. The horse was a bay mare of indeterminate age and unspectacular appearance and very good temperament, which he judged to be the correct combination of qualities for a minister in the back country. He called her Dunluce, which Nancy told him was sentimental. He told Nancy that a man who had survived eleven weeks on the Lord Dunluce had earned the right to name his horse after it.

Nancy said: "*The ship wis named efter a man and the man efter a castle, no the ither wey roond.*"

He said: "*The horse is named efter the ship.*"

She considered this and concluded, he could see, that it was not worth the argument, which was a sign of maturity in a sixteen-year-old.

The road north was one hundred and fifty miles of what the locals called a road and what Martin would have called, in Ulster, a suggestion.

They moved in groups — some by wagon, some on horseback, some on foot, the children traded between arms and shoulders in a relay that never quite broke down though it threatened to break down several times a day. The country changed as they moved inland — the flat coastal plain giving way to sandy hills and then to harder ground, the vegetation thickening, the pines growing taller, the creeks running clearer as the gradient increased, and all of it on a scale that Martin found, each day, still impractical to absorb. In Ulster the country was measured in parishes and townlands, in fields with boundaries and hedgerows, in the human scale of a landscape that had been farmed and settled and fought over for a thousand years. Here the scale was different. The forest was not broken up into fields but extended, uninterrupted, from horizon to horizon, the muddy well rutted road cutting through it like an afterthought, the sky visible only in the gap directly above.

He put Jenny on the wagon but walked ahead sometimes, when the column stretched out and the pace was easy and there was nothing immediately requiring his attention.

He often walked with Nancy by his side leading his wagon with their meagre belongings, a few pieces of small furniture, the necessary portion of his library and what things they purchased to clear the land. He walked on the forest trail and tried to understand what he was seeing.

He had been reading the Psalms that morning — the one hundred and fourth, the creation Psalm, the Psalm of the God who stretches out the sky like a tent and makes the wind his

messenger and sends the springs into the valleys and causes the grass to grow. He had read it in the Ulster years and understood it in the Ulster scale — the particular fields, the particular hills, the lough catching the light in the particular way it caught the light in the late afternoon of certain October days. He read it now with America around him and found that it expanded, that the text expanded to accommodate the new world the way a text that is true expands to accommodate whatever reality you bring to it.

He appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.

The beasts of the Carolina forest were present. He had heard them in the night — sounds without equivalent in Ulster, sounds that did not yet have names attached to them in his mind, sounds that would acquire names as he acquired the country. He was not afraid of them. This was a fact he noted without particular pride: the sounds in the dark did not frighten him. They interested him.

He thought this was probably useful.

They stopped and camped for a Sabbath rest.

They reached Rocky Creek on a Tuesday in early February.

It was not what he had imagined and was better than he had imagined and was also, in the ways that mattered most, exactly what he had imagined: a creek running fast and clear over flat rock, the banks lined with hardwoods just beginning to show the first suggestion of spring, the land on the rise above the creek open and flat and workable, with the particular quality of

good ground — a darkness in the soil, a readiness — that a farmer's son recognises without being taught to.

There were people waiting.

Not from the ship — from the country. The Scots-Irish settlers who had come down from Pennsylvania and Virginia and Maryland over the previous decade, who had heard that a minister was coming, a Reformed Presbyterian minister, a Covenanting minister, who had come three thousand miles to bring the word and the discipline and the inheritance to the back country — they had built the log meeting house and named it *Catholic Presbyterian* as an aspiration of unity in the new world, but their struggling pastor Mr Richardson, a *new light* preacher who preferred the psalms of Isaac Watts to the Psalms of David, had strangely departed from this life and they had waited for another sent form God. Now here they were, twenty, thirty people who held to the true old light of scripture, gathered at the creek on a February morning in the mild Carolina winter, and some of them were weeping.

He had not expected the weeping.

Jenny dismounted — Dunluce was well-behaved about the crowd, he was grateful for this — and Martin walked toward the waiting people, and one of them, a woman of perhaps sixty, came to meet them, and took his hand in both of hers, and said nothing, because she was weeping too thoroughly to speak.

He stood and held the old woman's hands and looked over her head at the creek and the hardwoods and the workable ground and the people, his people, these people who had been waiting.

He thought of Crawford in the barn at Drummond, thirty years ago: *What was needed was a man.*

He thought: *Lord. I am here.*

He thought: *Noo the wark begins agane.*

Around him the settlers and the other ships' company were finding each other, the exchanges beginning — where are you from, who is your family, have you come far, what is the state of Ireland — the ordinary human business of a community assembling itself, which was both entirely ordinary and, in this latitude and this light, with these particular people who had come so far by such different roads to arrive at this creek on this Tuesday morning, not ordinary at all.

The woman released his hands. She wiped her face. She straightened.

"*We hae a meetinhoose*," she said. "*It's no much.*"

"*Show me*," he said.

She led him up the rise from the creek to where the trees thinned and a clearing opened and there, in the clearing, was a building — raw timber, fresh-cut, the sap still dark in the wood, a single room with a plank floor and glassless windows and a vacant pulpit of sorts at the far end, a raised platform with a lectern.

He stood in the doorway and looked at it.

It smelled of cut wood and Carolina clay and something he could not immediately name that turned out, on reflection, to be anticipation — the quality of a space that has been built for a purpose and is waiting for the purpose to arrive.

He stepped inside.

He walked to the pulpit. He set his hands on the lectern that had been vacated in sorrowful providence but his call and all

his faith and hope was fulfilled at this moment as he had entered into his labours. He looked out through the empty doorway at the winter sky.

He opened his mouth.

"*Lat us worship God*," he said.

To no one. To the empty room. To the creek and the pines and the workable ground and the new world assembling itself outside the door.

Then Nancy was in the doorway. Then Jenny his wife, Jean and Robert Stinson. Then the others, filing in, filling the room, the way people fill a room that has been built for them, which is with the particular ease of occupying a place that was always intended.

Martin gave out the line. His voice in the new room was different from his voice in the Ulster meetinghouse — more resonance, the raw timber giving it back differently, and the silence of the American forest around it that was not silence at all but a fullness of sound, birds and creek and wind in the high pines.

They sang.

A startled bluejay scolded from a branch at the window.

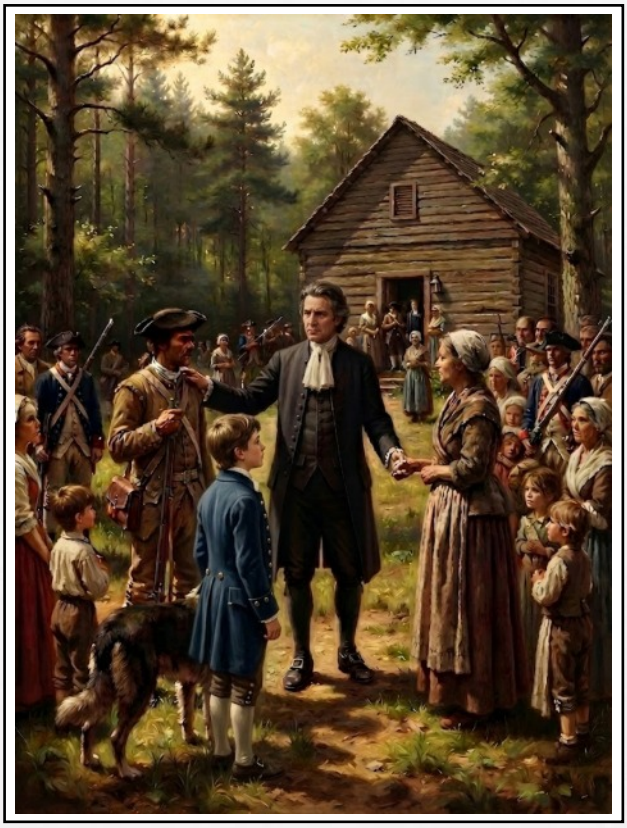
The old Psalm, the words worn smooth by generations of mouths, the tune that had crossed the water from Scotland to Ulster to this Carolina clearing, the inheritance carried in the voice, in the blood, in the shaped breath of at least a hundred people standing in an unfinished room in a new world on a Tuesday morning:

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me down to lie in pastures green; He leaded me the quiet waters by.

Outside, the creek ran over the flat rock.

The pines moved in the mild wind.

America received them.



"He shook sixty hands, seventy, eighty, and with each hand there was something exchanged that was not just the handshake" Page 163

CHAPTER TEN

The Silver Trumpets

Rocky Creek, South Carolina —June 11, 1780

Daniel Stinson, aged thirteen

Daniel Stinson would remember it whole.

This was unusual. He was thirteen years old and most things did not stay — they blurred at the edges within days, the specific words lost, the faces becoming general, the feeling persisting after the detail had gone the way that a smell persists in a room after the thing producing the smell has been removed. But the War Sermon stayed whole. It stayed the way certain things stay — the way the smell of a specific morning stays, the way a face seen at a particular angle in particular light stays — entire and retrievable, so that fifty years later he could close his eyes and be back in that room with the same completeness he had been in it then, the smell of the green wood and the July heat and the people pressed together and the sound of the men walking their rounds outside.

He had been brought by his father.

His father was not a man who required explanation and Daniel Stinson at thirteen was a boy who had learned not to ask for it. His father said: we are going to the meetinghouse, put on your good coat. Daniel put on his good coat. His mother pressed her lips together in the way she had when she disagreed with something and had decided to disagree with it silently, which usually meant the disagreement was about something she considered dangerous, because with ordinary disagreements she simply said so.

He noticed all of this.

He was a noticing child. He had been a noticing child from before he was old enough to have a word for it — aware of the temperature of rooms, the quality of silences, the things people communicated by what they did not say. His mother said he was too watchful. His father said he was sharp. Rev. Martin had said, once, examining him in the Shorter Catechism, that he had a mind that God would have a use for, which was the most alarming thing anyone had ever said to him and which he had been trying, unsuccessfully, to stop thinking about ever since.

They came to the meetinghouse in the early morning, the heat already building, the Carolina summer doing what it did, which was to announce its intentions with the first light and fulfil them completely by noon and go on fulfilling them well into the evening in case anyone had missed the point. The road to the meetinghouse was dusty and the dust lay on everything — the wagon wheels, the horses, the coats of the men and the shawls of the women, the small faces of the children who had been brought, like Daniel, in their good coats and in the knowledge that something important was happening.

He counted the wagons outside. Twenty-three. He counted the horses. Forty-one. He had a habit of counting things. It gave him something to do with the noticing.

He found a place on a log — they had put logs along the side walls for additional seating, the pews having filled — and pressed himself against the wall and looked at the congregation.

He had never seen the meetinghouse this full.

The sentinels were the thing Daniel would think about afterward.

He had noticed them on the way in — men stationed at intervals around the clearing, each with a rifle, moving slowly in a perimeter. His father had glanced at them once and looked away with the carefully neutral expression he used when he had already accounted for something and did not intend to discuss it. Daniel had stored this expression alongside the pressing of his mother's lips and the good coat and the twenty-three wagons and waited.

Inside, the congregation was doing what congregations did before a service — the low murmur of settlement, the finding of seats, the exchange of the particular whispers of people who know each other well and are now collecting each other's news after a separation. But the whispers were quieter than usual and the settlement faster, and Daniel noticed that many of the men were not sitting but standing along the walls, and that their hands were not folded but loose at their sides, and that the quality of their attention was different from Sunday attention, more concentrated, directed outward as much as inward.

He felt his father's hand on his shoulder, briefly, then gone.

Mr Martin came in from the side.

He did not process in, the way he sometimes did for the great services. He came in from the side door and walked directly to the pulpit and set his Bible on the lectern and stood for a moment looking at the congregation, and the congregation looked back at him, and the room went entirely quiet.

He was fifty-one years old. Daniel knew this because he had counted Mr Martin's years the way he counted wagons and

horses, as a matter of record. Fifty-one, which was old, Daniel thought, though Mr Martin had aged under the weight of his shepherd's burden carrying these lambs. However he was still large, still carrying the physical authority of a man who had ridden the Carolina back country for seven years through weather and distance, though his hair was fully white now and there were lines in his face that Daniel had not catalogued before. He was not fully aware of the troubles between Rev Martin and the wilful people of the district who like Presbyterians seem fixated on inharmonious division as a rite of passage. They saw the shedding of the minister with *old light* ideals as a snake sheds its skin, but he heard others say that a snake is doomed to slither on its belly and eat of the dust of the ground. For those loyal to the old ways to sing a paraphrase or Watts' psalms was *strange fire* before a holy God.

He had heard this whispered as people gathered for Sabbath meeting, or from his parent's low tones in the kitchen at night. He had once asked if there were other Covenanters? He was told that there were in Pennsylvania, somewhere far away, but they never came, not like other churches with visiting preachers.

We followed Mr Martin, built a new meeting house down the road and moved on. But there were reasons, Daniel remembered the sorrow in Mr Martin, and the deep love the congregation had for him the Sabbath after his wife and baby had died of fever.

Nancy, was lovely, he thought, a foil to her father's gravity. She was now Mrs McGaw and was attentive as she could to her father, but now with her own children had less time for a man who found consolation in riding wherever he thought men

needed preaching, and suffered the pains of cold and rain with the accompanying liquid 'spirit' of hospitality which proved the curse of the Scot.

Daniel's father had remained loyal even his minister had at times taken more whisky than is good for a man of his qualities, but Rev Martin held the banner of Jehovah high.

Rev Martin had returned from preaching in Cawtaba and had been stopped by the Loyalists. Daniel knew men violently disagreed on the war with the English in the north and market day in Chester felt like the air before a lightning storm. His parents prayed that the Devil would not come to the district and the love for Christ's kingship and for our fellow man would crush this enmity. But the English had come and the devils Tarleton and Huck with them. Men had been killed in the Waxhaws by these wicked soldiers about two weeks ago, and without mercy. They had already killed Mr McClurkan, one of his father's neighbours, they took him from his sickbed and shot him dead in front of his wife and that morning his older friend William Strong, had been shot dead, while reading the scriptures before the meeting, but they both had joined the Patriots. To Daniel the thrilling tales of the *Killing Times* were more stirring than the epistle to the Hebrews in family worship. But now the stories of the *Bonnie Blue Banner* were real and was Mr Martin, like the spirit of Elijah or Richard Cameron, or Donald Cargill returned?

Yet that day his voice was one crying in the wilderness.

Now Rev Martin looked, Daniel thought, *Like a man that had makkit his mind an wis nou gaun tae say it oot loud.*

"*Lat us worship God.*"

He sensed a silence in heaven.

The Psalm was the seventy-sixth.

Daniel did not know all the Psalms by number — he was working on it, he had the first fifty reasonably well and was into the sixties — but he knew this one because it had always seemed to him the most martial of the Psalms, the one that sounded least like what people meant when they said the word devotional, the one that sounded like something a general might say before a battle rather than something a congregation sang before a sermon.

In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle.

They sang it slowly, in the old way, two hundred voices in the June heat.

Daniel sang it with them and felt something he had felt a few times before in the meetinghouse but not often — felt the Psalm as something alive rather than inherited, a thing with contemporary relevance rather than ancient authority only. He was thirteen years old and could not have articulated this but he felt it: the arrows of the bow and the shield and the sword were not metaphors in this room. The men along the walls had rifles. The sentinels outside were walking their rounds in the actual present, in the actual heat, listening for actual dragoons.

The Psalm was not old.

This Psalm was now.

Mr Martin opened to Numbers chapter 10.

Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps.

And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee.

When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward.

When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey: they shall blow an alarm for their journeys.

But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm. And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance for ever throughout your generations.

When ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.

He began quietly. "*The siller trumps, for the assembling an' the journeying.*"

This was his way — to begin below the place where he would end, so that the congregation experienced the sermon as a gradual ascent rather than a performance of arrival. Daniel had heard enough of Mr Martin's sermons to know the pattern and to watch for the moments of shift, the places where the argu-

ment tightened or the register changed or the voice found a new register and the room changed with it.

He preached the text. He preached the context — the wilderness, the journeying people, the law of the trumpet that distinguished the assembly from the alarm, the gathering from the battle. He preached the theology of it: that the people of God were not pacifists in the sense of those who believed that suffering injustice was itself holy, that the Covenanting tradition had always held that there were moments when the defence of the right, the protection of the covenant community, the resistance of tyranny was not merely permitted but required. He cited the Solemn League and Covenant. He cited the Scriptures on the duty of rulers and the corresponding duty of the ruled when rulers became tyrants. He spoke carefully and he spoke with the precision of a man who knows he is being listened to by people who will act on what they hear.

Daniel noticed the men along the walls.

They were still. Not the stillness of men restraining themselves — the stillness of men who have already resolved something and are hearing it confirmed.

Rev Martin moved to the present.

He spoke of the war. He spoke of it directly, without the vagueness that Daniel had noticed some other preachers using — the careful both-sides language that left a man unsure what had been said. Mr Martin said: "*the British airmy haes garrisoned the back country. My hearers, talk and angry words will dae nae guid. We maun fight! There is a time tae pray and a time tae fight, and the time tae fight has come. Cornwallis has come sooth wi' the intention o' takin the Carolinas and restorin the Crown's authority by whitever means are required.*" Mr Martin lowered his brows and looked around at

the men: "*the men o' this congregation ken what 'by whitever means are required' has meant in the settlements tae the north, whaur Tarleton's dragoons had come through Waxhaws and taen the meanin o' restraint oot o' the language entirely.*" Stretching out his hand north to the Waxhaws, he said, "*Gang see the tender mercies o' Great Britain! Is this no cruelty a parallel tae the history o' oor Scottish faithers, driven frae their Conventicles, hunted like wild beasts?*"

The room was absolutely still.

Rev Martin continued: "*a man has the richt tae defend his family.*" He said: "*we hae the richt tae defend oor covenant obligations, the Solemn League and Covenant wisnae a political document that became obsolete when political circumstances changed; it wis a moral document bindin on them that inherited it, and its bindin wis tae the cause o' civil and religious liberty against aw comers, includin the Crown.* "

He paused.

The pause was a long one. Outside, Daniel could hear the sentinel's footsteps on the dry ground, regular as a heartbeat.

"*The time tae fight*," Rev Martin said, "*is when fightin is the only remainin form o' faithfulness.*"

Daniel felt the thing pass through the room again — the thing he had felt during the Psalm, the sensation of a current, of many people moving in the same direction at the same moment, a collective shift, a corporate something that was more than the sum of its individual parts.

His father's jaw was set.

The man beside his father, John Ross from the creek's north branch, had his eyes fixed on Mr Martin with an expression Daniel associated with the moments in planting when a man

has been working toward something for a long time and sees, finally, the shape of the thing he has been working toward.

Rev Martin preached for two hours.

Daniel knew because he counted. He kept time in his head with the light — the angle of the sunlight through the un-glassed windows shifted through the morning, moving across the plank floor in a slow diagonal, and he tracked it the way he tracked the things he could count, as a means of holding the experience at a distance that made it possible to observe.

But the distance did not hold.

He was thirteen years old and he was sitting in a room where the whole adult world — the world of his father and his mother's pressed lips and the sentinels outside and the rifles along the walls — was resolving into something clear and hard and unavoidable, and the sermon was the instrument of the resolution, and he could feel it happening in his own body, in his chest and his hands, as a sensation that had no name in the vocabulary of an thirteen-year-old but that he would name, when he was older, as conviction.

Not the conviction of a man persuaded by an argument. The conviction of a person who has looked at the world clearly, perhaps for the first time, and seen what it requires.

Mr Martin came to the close.

He stood in the pulpit in the July heat with his white hair and his fifty-one years and the Bible open before him and hundreds of people in the room and more in the yard catching the weightiest phrases whispered mouth to ear from the sacred inner meeting. The sentinels walking outside and the British army a days' ride to the south and he did not promise victory.

Daniel noticed this specifically — the absence of the promise. He did not say: "*God will deliver ye*." He did not say: "*the richteous cannae fall*." He said:

"*God disnae promise his people the easy path. He promises them his presence on whitever path they walk. He promised it tae Israel in the wilderness. He promised it tae the Covenanters on the muir. He promises it noo. No deliverance frae the danger. Deliverance through it. No exemption frae the cost. Company in the payin o' it. Tak up yer rifles, men o' Rocky Creek. Gang in the name o' the God o' Israel and the God o' the Covenant and for Christ's Croon, that may yet be recognised ower thae republics. And if ye maun fall, fall kennin that ye stand afore a King whase kingdom disnae fall.*"

He closed the Bible.

He bowed his head.

"*Lat us pray.*"

The prayer lasted twenty minutes.

Daniel kept his eyes open. He did not usually keep his eyes open during prayer — he kept them open now because he wanted to see, because something told him, with the clarity of the things that would stay whole, that he was in the presence of an event that would be part of the story he told about himself for the rest of his life and that he should look at it carefully while it was happening.

He looked at the bowed heads and the closed eyes and the men who prayed with their eyes open, facing outward, which was the right thing to do.

He looked at his father.

Robert Stinson was a man of moderate speech and definite action, a man who farmed well and built well and kept his word without needing to talk about keeping it. He had not, in the years of Daniel's observation, wept. He was weeping now — not copiously, not dramatically, a single tracked line on each cheek — with his eyes closed and his jaw set and his hands folded on his knees, and his whole face had the quality of a man holding something very large very still.

Daniel looked at him and thought: my father is going to war.

The thought arrived whole, without gradations. It did not feel possible to think it in any smaller form than the whole form.

He looked back at Rev Martin.

The prayer was ending. He could tell by the gathering quality of the voice — the way the sentences shortened, the way the language moved from petition toward doxology, the way the room's attention shifted from the specific requests to the larger thing that contained them.

"*...in whase hauns are the lives o' aw men and the fates o' aw kingdoms and the ootcome o' aw battles and the resurrection o' aw the deid. Through Christ that is the King o' kings. Amen.*"

Mr Martin dropped a heavy amen that rippled through the congregation through door and window into the bright searing sunlight. On every tongue it was a covenantal union for what must be done.

Daniel was terrified to breathe the word.

The room breathed.

Outside, the June day had become what summer in Carolina always became by mid-morning, which was serious.

The men were gathering in groups. Daniel stayed close to his father without being told to, in the way of children who understand that this is a moment requiring proximity without explanation. He watched the groups form and dissolve and re-form. He watched the older men and the younger men and the ways they talked to each other and the ways they did not talk, the communications that happened in the nods and the silences.

Mr Martin was at the door of the meetinghouse, shaking hands as the congregation filed out. He moved through the meetinghouse yard as if greeting mourners with the hope of the eternities.

Daniel watched him.

He shook sixty hands, seventy, eighty, and with each hand there was something exchanged that was not just the handshake — a look, a word, in some cases something that Daniel was too far away to hear. He was not performing the handshake. He was doing it the way he did everything — with complete attention, each person the full object of his regard, no division, no distraction.

One man stopped in front of him — Thomas Barber, from the south fork of Fishing Creek, whose brother had been among the Waxhaws dead — and said something that made Rev Martin grip his hand in both of his and hold it for a moment with his eyes closed, and Daniel could not hear what was said and did not need to.

At the end, when most of the congregation had dispersed to their horses and their wagons and their various roads home, to

make preparations for the muster, Mr Martin walked to the edge of the clearing and stood looking south.

Daniel watched him.

He stood alone at the edge of the clearing and looked into the forest where the road ran toward the British lines, and his face was the face of a man looking at something that is not quite there yet but is coming and can be seen, if you know how to look, in the distance.

Then he turned. He went back inside the empty meetinghouse. Through the open door Daniel could see him take his place at the pulpit — empty room, no congregation — and bow his head.

He was praying.

Daniel Stinson stood in the heat with his good coat on and watched the minister pray in the empty room, and understood, without the words for it, something about what it meant to send men to their deaths in the name of God — the weight of it, the cost of it, the fact that the man who had preached the sermon was now alone in the room with what he had done, without the people to give it weight and witness, just him and the God he had invoked and the question of whether he had read that invocation right. He had brought his people through an ocean of terror for this?

He did not know if Mr Martin doubted.

He thought, looking through the door at the bowed white head, that whether he doubted or not, he would keep going.

Some things you know about a man.

Sixty-four of them mustered that week.

Daniel knew this because his father told him, the evening before he left, sitting at the table after supper with a directness Daniel had not experienced before from him — the directness of a man who has decided that his son is old enough for the truth.

Sixty-four men from Rocky Creek and the surrounding settlements. Most of them with rifles. Some with only hunting knives and the conviction that this was sufficient, which it was not, and which Rev Martin had apparently said plainly, and which they had apparently received and then come anyway.

His father left on a Thursday.

His mother packed his kit in the pre-dawn and did not say the things she was thinking, and Daniel stood in the yard and watched his father ride out in the dark toward whatever the dark contained, and thought about the sermon, about company in the paying of it, about the God who promises presence rather than exemption.

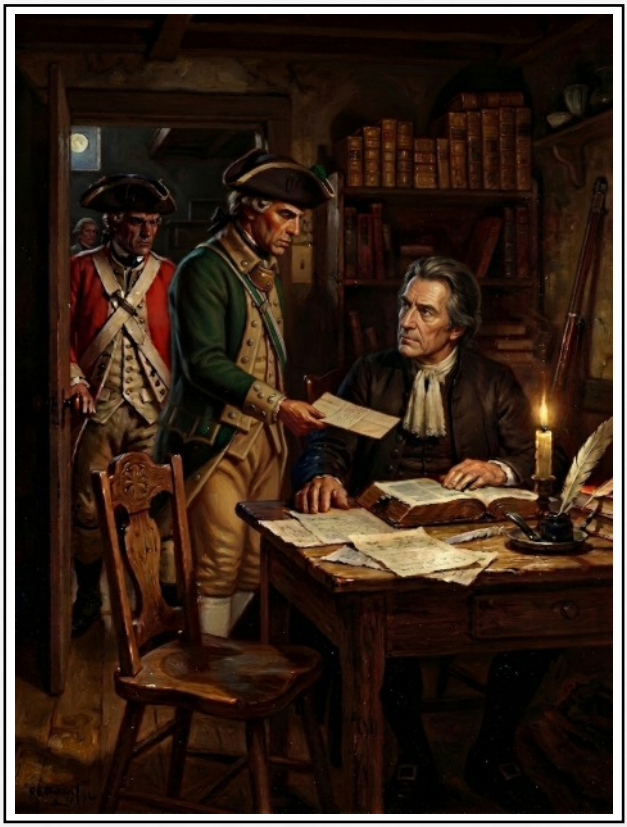
He stood in the yard for a long time after the sound of the horse was gone.

Then he went inside and sat at the table and opened his Bible to Psalm seventy-six and read it in the thin morning light:

There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.

He read it twice. Three times.

He was thirteen years old and his father was riding toward the war.



"He said: "William Martin?" I said: "Aye." He said: "You are taken." Page 169

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Felon's Road

Rocky Creek to Rocky Mount to Camden to Winnsboro — June to December, 1780
Reverend William Martin

They found me at my desk.

This is the thing I have thought about most in the months since — not the binding, not the road to Rocky Mount, not the blockhouse or the jail at Camden or the long months between. The thing I return to is the desk. I was sitting at my desk in the study of the stone house on the north fork of Big Rocky Creek, writing the second sermon, when they came through the door.

I had known they would come. I had known it since the Monday, when word reached me that our Captain Land was dead and the New York Volunteers were in the district with a warrant for my arrest. I had known it and I had stayed at my desk because there was nowhere else to be. The house was empty except for me and the papers and the morning light coming through the single window onto the text I was working from, which was the thirty-first Psalm. *In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust. Let me never be ashamed.* I had chosen it before I knew they were coming, which I mention only because it strikes me as the kind of providence that a man notices when he has time to look back on it.

They were Loyalist militia, not regular army — four men, young, with the particular confidence of men who have been given authority they have not previously had and intend to use it thoroughly. Their officer was perhaps twenty-five. He had

the look of a man from the back country, Scots-Irish himself, which is its own kind of bitter irony, the kind that the war produced in quantities sufficient to last a generation.

He said: "*William Martin?*"

I said: "*Aye.*"

He said: "*You are taken.*"

I said: "*Ye say what is obvious.*" And I set down my pen and stood up and they bound my hands in front of me with a rope that was tighter than it needed to be and led me out of my own house into the June morning.

I did not look back at the desk. Looking back would not have changed anything and I was not in the business of gestures that cost nothing and accomplish nothing.

They had horses. I did not. The road to Rocky Mount Fort was perhaps seven miles and I walked it.

Behind me, as we left the farm, in the distance over the pine-tops, I heard the sound of the meetinghouse burning.

I did not turn around. I knew what it was from the quality of the sound — the particular roar of a substantial log building taking fire and with it years of Sabbaths.

The sound of it burning accompanied us for perhaps half a mile before it fell behind the trees.

I prayed as I walked. This was not heroism — it was necessity, the same necessity that made me preach on the day Mary died, not because I was sufficient to the occasion but because the occasion required something and I was the only one present who had anything to offer. I prayed the thirty-first Psalm from

memory, the one I had been working from at the desk, and the praying steadied something in me that the binding and the burning and the young militia officer's satisfaction had unsettled.

Thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

The road was dry and the June sun was full and the back country went about its business around us — birds, the sound of the creek in the distance, a hawk moving overhead with the indifference of a creature that has no stake in the human arrangements being enacted below. I thought about Claverhouse's men riding after the Covenanters in Scotland. I thought about my grandfather, who had crossed to Ulster carrying the Psalms and the Confession and the memory of the *killing time* as a living thing, not a history. I thought: here it is again. Not the same — not the same men, not the same ground, not even quite the same cause — but the same shape. The same shape of a man being walked to a blockhouse for the crime of saying what he believed from a pulpit.

The young officer said nothing to me on the road. He was not a cruel man, I thought — he was a man doing a job that had been given to him and not examining it very carefully, which is a different thing from cruelty and in some ways more common. I did not speak to him either. There was nothing to say that would have been useful and I was conserving my breath for the Psalm.

Rocky Mount blockhouse was a timber fortification on the bluff above the Rocky Creek's junction with the Catawba — a low substantial building, practical, designed for exactly this kind of use: the holding of people whose existence was inconvenient. I had ridden past it a dozen times. I had never been inside.

The inside was smaller than the outside suggested, which is the general character of places designed for custody, and it smelled of damp wood and the accumulated discomfort of previous occupants.

They put me in with Thomas Walker, a farmer from the north fork of the creek, a quiet man who had been taken for different reasons and who received my arrival with the grave courtesy of a man managing his own situation and choosing to extend that management to include a new neighbour. We shook hands. We sat on opposite sides of the room and looked at the walls and I began, in the way that a man begins things he has not planned but which present themselves as necessary, to understand that I was going to be here for a long time.

The first thing I learned about imprisonment is that it remakes time.

Not slows it — that is too simple an account. It remakes it entirely. Outside, time is organised by purpose: the sermon that needs writing, the family that needs visiting, the road that needs riding before dark. Inside, time is organised by nothing, which is to say it is not organised at all, which is to say it becomes an undifferentiated substance that a man must find his own way through without the usual landmarks.

I organised it with prayer and Scripture, which is what a Covenanting minister does because it is the only organisation available and also because it is the right organisation regardless of what else is available. I prayed at the hours I would have preached. I worked through the Psalms from memory, not consecutively but as they presented themselves — the Psalm that seemed most true to the particular quality of the particular

day, which meant that the thirty-fifth and the thirty-eighth and the eighty-eighth appeared with some frequency, being the Psalms of unjust imprisonment and godly lament, but that the forty-sixth came also, and the hundred and third, and the twenty-third more than once.

Walker was not a great conversationalist but he was a good listener, which is in its own way a more valuable quality. In the evenings we talked — about the farms, about the families, about the state of the war as we were able to piece it together from what the guards said and what the occasional new prisoner brought with him. I asked after my congregation when anyone came in who might know. The news was not easy to receive.

Captain Land was dead, killed in the days after my War Sermon. Sixty-four men had mustered and gone to join the Patriot forces. I knew most of those sixty-four names — I had baptised their children, buried their parents in another land, married them, prayed with them in their sicknesses. I knew what they had walked away from and what they had walked toward and what they would find when they arrived, which was a war in the back country that was not like the war being described in the northern newspapers but something older and closer and more personal — neighbour against neighbour, debts paid in blood, the thirty years of accumulated community grievance being settled under a military justification that gave the settling a legal cover it would not otherwise have had.

I prayed for them by name.

Every one of the sixty-four, every name I could hold in my memory, every morning and every evening. It took about an hour to pray them all. Thomas Walker, who was not a religious

man in the formal sense, sat with his eyes closed while I did this and did not interrupt and afterward said nothing, which was the correct response.

On July 30, I heard the sound of battle.

I had been sleeping, or attempting sleep, which in the blockhouse had a provisional quality that real sleep does not — a condition in which the body rests while the mind continues its separate operations, attending to the sounds outside with the specific alertness of a man who knows that the sounds outside may concern him directly.

The sounds concerned me directly.

It was Colonel Sumter. I learned this afterward, not during — during, all I knew was that there were men attacking the blockhouse from the outside and men defending it from the inside, and that Thomas Walker and I were inside but not among the defenders, and that this distinction was important and potentially mortal. The firing came from the south, then from the east, then from both directions simultaneously, which meant the attackers were attempting to surround the position, which meant they were organised, them which meant it was a proper military action and not a raid. My elder and friend, William Anderson was among these brave and reckless men.

I got under the floor.

This is perhaps less dignified than I would prefer it to be in the telling, but it is what happened. There was a section of plank flooring near the north wall that Walker had identified in our first days as being loose — the kind of thing you notice when you have nothing to do but examine your surroundings with

systematic attention, and we had had considerable time for systematic attention. We had not discussed what we would do with the knowledge. When the firing started we both moved toward the north wall simultaneously without speaking, and Walker worked the plank up with his hands and I went through the gap first because I was nearer, and Walker followed, and we lay in the dark beneath the blockhouse floor with the firing above us and the Catawba smell in the earth and the Psalm in my head — *God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble* — and waited.

The battle lasted perhaps two hours. Then it stopped.

We heard the sound of men moving above us — not the fighting sounds but the aftermath sounds, the sounds of men taking stock. We stayed under the floor. We did not know whose men they were. Walker put his hand on my arm in the dark, not in communication exactly, but as the kind of human contact that a man extends when the darkness is complete and the uncertainty is total.

I thought about Sumter. I thought: if it is Sumter's men above us they will find us and we will be free. I thought about what free meant — the burned meetinghouse and home and the sermon half-written on the desk and the sixty-four men somewhere in the back country doing what I had sent them to do.

Then the sounds moved away.

I did not know then whether we had been rescued or passed over or simply overlooked. I know now that it was Sumter's men and that the blockhouse had not fallen, and that Sumter's militia had withdrawn without taking the position, and that the British reinforcements were on the way. What I knew in the moment was that the sounds had stopped and that Walker's

hand was on my arm and that the dark under the floor was the same dark it had always been.

We came back up through the gap.

The guard who found us expressed no particular surprise. He was a Loyalist militiaman from Lancaster County and he looked at us with the expression of a man who has seen a great deal in a short time and has decided to manage one thing at a time, and he said: "Back agin the wa'," and we went back against the wall.

They took us to Camden in August.

The road was longer and the weather was worse — the Carolina August, which is the most serious weather I have experienced in either hemisphere, a heat that has an intention to it, as though the air itself has decided to make a point. I walked most of the road to Camden as I had walked the road to Rocky Mount, bound, in the sun, with the back country on all sides and the war in it and the names of my congregation in my head and a Psalm underneath the names.

Before we left Rocky Mount I heard exactly what had happened to Will Stroud and Archibald McClurkin and how Colonel Phillips had been with that blasphemer Captain Huck. I had encountered Phillips in Jackson Creek and later near Chester as he sat astride a mare at the edge of a preaching in Cooper's field. He listened as a man reluctant to give up a burden, and seemed to straighten his back in the saddle as I spoke about the weary and heavy laden. I preached loudly the call of the saviour, "*Come untae me!*" that he might throw of his bonds. He had turned his mare's head and cantered off. I asked who he was, "*James Phillips frae Aboghill, as decent a loyalist as the devil ever made.*"

Now he was with Huck. I thought him to be a better man than that.

I will not set down all of what I heard. The substance is that they had been taken and hanged on Tarleton's orders, naked, from a tree on the creek road, and left. Will Stroud — who had come with us on the Lord Dunluce as a boy of eight, whose father William I had commended to Captain Land from the pulpit, who had sworn the Loyalist oath under Rawdon's proclamation and then renounced it and gone to the Patriot militia and done what young men do when the war takes hold of them fully — Will Stroud was dead on a tree above Rocky Creek.

I thought about my exhortation that hot Sabbath in June. "*Gang see the tender mercies o' Great Britain.*"

Was I too hot in my sedition?

I thought about William Strong, shot in the barn yard while his mother watched.

I thought: *A hae sent thir fowk intil this.*

I want to be honest about this thought because it is the thought that imprisonment gives a man time for, and that time given to it can either become despair or can be brought before God and held there until it becomes something else. The something else is not comfort — I want to be precise about this because false comfort is an insult to the dead and the men at risk and the families at home. The something else is not comfort but clarity. I had sent those men into this with the best understanding I possessed of what the Scripture required in such circumstances, and the Scripture I had preached had not changed because Will Stroud was dead, and Christ's kingship over nations had not been revised because Captain Land was dead, and the claim of

the Covenant had not been withdrawn because the New York Volunteers were burning meetinghouses in the Carolina back country.

What was required of me now was not to unmake the sermon. It could not be unmade and I would not have unmade it if it could.

What was required was to survive. To pray. To hold the ground that was available to me, which was not a pulpit or a plantation or a stone house but a length of road in the August sun, and then a jail in Camden, and then whatever came after the jail.

I held it.

The Camden jail was a small building holding approximately one hundred and sixty people, many were simply the town's residents with infants and the old, fading in the torrid August heat.

I do not say this for effect. I say it because it was the fact and the fact shaped everything else — the air, which was not sufficient, the sleep, which was not possible in any sustained form, the prayer, which continued because it was the only private space available, being conducted internally rather than aloud since aloud was not possible in the noise of one hundred and sixty people managing their various situations in the same room.

I knew some of the men there. Several from the Rocky Creek congregation, taken for various involvements with the Patriot forces. Two Presbyterian elders from Fishing Creek, solid men, who received my presence with the relieved gravity of people

encountering their minister in circumstances where the ministry is immediately relevant.

I was their minister in that jail. I cannot say that I discharged the function with the fullness I would have wished — the conditions did not permit it — but I did what was possible. I prayed with those who wanted prayer. I heard what they needed to say and said what I was able to say in return. I held the text from memory and spoke from it when occasion permitted, not at length — length was not possible — but in the fragments that the situation made available, the way you pass bread when the bread is insufficient for the number present: you pass what you have and trust that God will do with the passing what he did with the loaves and the fishes.

He did not, in the usual sense, multiply the bread. People suffered. The heat was significant and the air was not sufficient and the summer was the summer. Three men died in that jail that would not have died in other circumstances, and their dying was slow and visible and could not be turned away from.

I prayed for them as they died. This was what was available.

News reached us imperfectly, in fragments, brought by new prisoners or extracted from guards who sometimes were indifferent enough to share what they knew. I heard about the battle at Camden on the sixteenth of August, when Tarleton repelled the attack — heard it from a guard who told us with the satisfaction of a man reporting a score, and received it with the composure of a man who has learned that information received in captivity should be held lightly, since captivity distorts the receiving of information the way water distorts the shape of objects seen through it.

I heard, harder, about William Anderson.

He had been killed on August 22. Shot in a surprise Loyalist attack, his body falling on his captain's wife to shield her from further harm.

William Anderson, who had shaken my hand at the meeting-house door in Kirkhills on the day Mary died and did not need to say anything. Who had built the first Covenanter meeting-house, who had stood with me in my failings. Who had told his wife Nancy as he left for the war, that he went in hope of this country being renewed by the Covenant.

"*Dear Nancy, I might hae mairriet her wance.*

He wis that better man."

William was buried where he fell.

I sat in the Camden jail in the August heat and held that fact and prayed, and the prayer was the kind of prayer that does not have much language in it — not the public prayer, the ordered address with its structured petitions and its theological precision, but the other kind, the kind that is mostly silence directed upward, mostly the presentation of a fact to God that God already knows and that the presenting of it is the only response available to the person presenting it.

"*Lord. William Anderson.*"

That was all. It was enough. God knew the rest.

They moved us in November, when the weather had broken enough to make the roads possible again.

I had been in custody since June. Five months — from the June morning at my desk to the November road north toward Winnsboro, where Cornwallis had established his winter head-

quarters. The road was cold after the August jail, which produced the specific irony of a cold that felt like relief, the first physical sensation in months that was not oppressive.

I was walking again. My hands were bound again, the same practical rope, and I was the largest man in the party, which meant the pace was set partly with reference to my pace, which I found I was capable of sustaining with more ease than I would have expected, the months in the jail having apparently not entirely dismantled the physical constitution that over fifty years of hard living had produced.

I prayed as I walked. The sixty-fourth Psalm, which is not one that gets much attention in ordinary pulpit use but which proved to have considerable application to the specifics of my situation: *Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy.*

We passed through the back country that I had been riding for seven years. I knew these roads from the saddle and the knowing of them from the road itself was different — smaller, closer, the details more visible at walking pace than at riding pace. A farmhouse I had preached at twice, the second time for a funeral, the wife dead of fever and the husband standing in the yard with the children around him with that particular quality of a man who has lost the organising principle of his household and does not yet know how to be in the world without it. I had preached from the forty-sixth Psalm that afternoon. The husband's name was John Coulter. I wondered if he was still on that land or had gone to the militia or taken the Loyalist oath or retreated north to Mecklenburg with the others.

I wondered about many things on that road.

The cabin at Winnsboro was not the jail.

This is important because the record will say I was imprisoned and it is true that I was not free, but the cabin was a different kind of custody — a small timber building on the edge of the British encampment, used for various purposes and currently used as a holding place for persons awaiting disposition by General Cornwallis's headquarters. There were two other men there when I arrived, neither of whom I knew, and a guard who sat outside the door with the resigned quality of a man assigned to a task that does not require much of him and does not intend to require more.

I had been in the cabin perhaps three weeks when they brought Minor Winn.

He was a young man — John Winn's son, perhaps twenty, twenty-two. He and his father had been taken in the aftermath of some action near the Winnsboro headquarters, the nature of which I was not told and did not ask about, my experience of received information in captivity having taught me to hold such things loosely. What I was told, by the guard, with a directness that I thought was perhaps unkind but was certainly honest, was that the Winns were condemned to hang before noon for attempting the murder of Cornwallis on the road.

Minor Winn came to the cabin in the pre-dawn morning.

He was in the state that I have seen men in before executions — not fear exactly, though fear was present. Something larger than fear. The specific condition of a man who has been told when and how his life will end and is now in the hours between that knowledge and its fulfilment, trying to understand what a

man does with such hours and finding that ordinary resources are not sufficient.

He asked for me.

I want to think carefully about why he asked for me specifically. He was a Presbyterian by background, not a Covenanter. He knew me, I think, by reputation rather than by personal acquaintance — knew the name, knew that June sermon, knew that I had been taken and held, which perhaps gave me a specific credibility with a man facing the consequences of resistance that a minister comfortably at home could not have had. I do not know. What I know is that he sent for me, and they brought me to him, and he was at the brush-pile near the gallows in the grey morning with his hands together and his face the face I have described.

I knelt beside him.

I did not preach. There are moments when preaching is not the form the ministry takes and this was one. I took his hands in my hands and I prayed, and I prayed aloud because he needed to hear the words rather than simply know that words were being said, and I prayed from the twenty-second Psalm because it was the Psalm of the man at the point of execution and I was not going to pretend we were not at that point.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me?

I prayed it through — not past it to the comfort at the end, not rushing to the resolution because the resolution was what we needed. I stayed in it. The forsaken place. The place where the cry goes up and appears to find no answer and the man cries again, not because he believes the answer is coming but because

the crying is itself the right response to the situation, the correct orientation of the creature toward the Creator in the moment when the creature's resources have entirely given out.

Minor Winn was weeping quietly. Not from self-pity — I have heard that weeping and this was not it. From the specific grief of a young man who understands that he is going to die before noon and who has, in the understanding of it, encountered something true about the nature of things that ordinary life does not make available.

I prayed on.

The drum and fife did not come.

Instead, after what I calculated to be perhaps a half hour of prayer, there were footsteps — not the executioner's steps, different steps, the purposeful steps of men with changed orders — and we were told to stand, and were walked, not to the gallows, but to the large house on the main street of Winnsboro that I had observed on arrival and identified, from its activity, as the headquarters.

I understood, as we walked, that something had changed.

I did not know what had changed. I did not yet know about Phillips, or about the Winn brothers' relationship with Phillips, or about the particular chain of obligation and providence that had produced this revision of our morning. What I knew was that Minor Winn was walking beside me and was alive, and that the God of the twenty-second Psalm, who does not promise exemption from the cross but who does not abandon the man on it, had done something in the dark of that November morning that neither the drum and fife nor the gallows could account for.

We walked to the headquarters.

Minor Winn's hands were shaking.

Mine were not, which I set down not as evidence of superior courage but as the fruit of five months of imprisonment in which the ground beneath me had been tested by everything that could test it, and had held, and the holding had produced in me a specific quality of steadiness that had nothing to do with my own constitution and everything to do with what the ground was made of.

For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hidden his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.

We went inside.

I set my shoulders. I raised my head. I looked ahead at the door of the front room where Lord Cornwallis waited, and behind that door, though I did not know it, a man from County Antrim whose father had trained the Cornwallis family's racehorses and who owed a debt he had not yet found occasion to pay.

The door opened.

What happened next belongs to the record — to the formal telling, the dialogue that has been set down and disputed and set down again, the exchange between an old man and a British general that turned, in the event, not on argument but on providence, not on my eloquence but on an encounter I had with a man years before and had forgotten, a memory cast upon the waters, returned after many days in the form that this life always produces its returns: unexpectedly, adequately, in the hand of a God who is most fully known not in the places of comfort but in the places of extremity.

I walked in.

I stood erect. My grey hair was uncovered. My eyes were on Cornwallis.

And I was not afraid.

This is not because I was a brave man in the ordinary sense. I had been afraid many times in the previous five months and I do not think it would serve any honest purpose to pretend otherwise. I had been afraid in the blockhouse when the firing started. I had been afraid in the Camden jail when the men died slowly and I could do nothing but pray. I had been afraid, in the pre-dawn at the brush-pile with Minor Winn, not for myself at that moment but for him, which is a different fear and in some ways a more consuming one.

I was not afraid now because there was nothing left to be afraid of.

Not in the sense of despair — I did not mean that I had given up or that the outcome had ceased to matter. I meant that five months of custody had removed from me, gradually and thoroughly, every remaining illusion about the things I had been relying on that were not God. The plantation was gone, or may as well have been. The meetinghouse was ash. The men I had sent to the war were scattered, some dead, some in other jails, some in the Mecklenburg country to the north. The second sermon was half-written on a desk in an empty house.

What remained was what had always been there and what I had sometimes, in the comfortable years of the ministry, allowed myself to regard as simply the background of the other things. It was not the background. It was the ground. It was the only ground. And standing on it, in the front room of a requisitioned house in Winnsboro in December 1780, I found I had nothing to manage, no image to maintain, no position to defend.

I had only the truth.

And the truth, in my experience, does not require a man to be afraid.

"*The Declaration of Independence*," I said, when the moment came, "*is but a reiteration o' what oor Covenantin faithers hae aye maintained.*"

He was suspicious of me and had been told of that Donegal minister Craighead who had espoused our cause for a time and who stirred the saints of Mecklenburg to presume to address the King about their liberties. The loyalists like Huck blamed the Covenanters for phrasing the colonies' declaration of independence. But Cornwallis was as ignorant of the Covenants and our struggles as any of the English.

But what I believed was true. It had been true before the war and would be true after it and the fact that it had cost me five months of imprisonment and might yet cost me my life did not alter the truth of it by a single syllable, and I would not alter it either, and I was at peace with whatever followed from the not-altering. I said it to Cornwallis's face, in the front room, standing erect, grey hair uncovered. This man who had set loose that carnal murderer Tarleton and his dragoons on my neighbours, driven into insurrection by the blind inefficiency of a distant parliament serving a misguided un-covenanted king. Yet this man I found to be moderate in his tone, open in countenance to judge men as he felt expedient to the moment and not by the rigidity of the letter. I said many things I believe remain true.

What followed was release.

I have not, in the years since, been able to fully account for it except in the terms in which it actually occurred, which are not

the terms of political calculation or military strategy or even the terms of a man from Ahoghill discharging a debt. All of those things were present and real. But underneath them, or rather constituting the ground in which they operated, was the fact that God was in that room, as He had been in the blockhouse and the Camden jail and the brush-pile in the pre-dawn dark, and that His purposes for Rocky Creek and for the Covenanting witness in this country were not concluded.

Minor Winn said it was an answer to prayer.

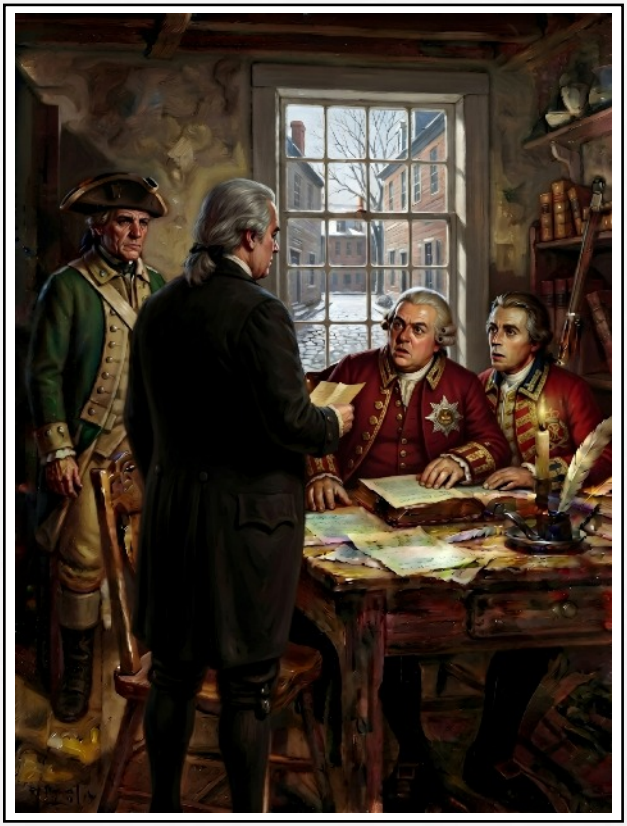
He was right.

I came out into the December air.

The road north stretched before me — back to Rocky Creek? Back to the ash of the meetinghouse and the half-written sermon and the congregation scattered by war. Back to the work.

I set my face toward it.

I had, as I have always had and always will have, nowhere else to go.



"You are charged with preaching rebellion from the pulpit." Page 203

CHAPTER TWELVE

Grey Hair Before Cornwallis

Winnsboro, South Carolina — December, 1780

Colonel John Phillips, Loyalist Militia

He had not expected an old man.

Phillips had been told — by the aide who brought the prisoner's file to his desk, a young Welshman named Griffiths who had the particular efficiency of junior officers who have not yet learned that efficiency applied to the wrong problem is indistinguishable from cruelty — that they had taken a minister. A Covenanting minister. One of the incendiary Presbyterians who had been preaching rebellion from their back-country pulpits since before Cornwallis crossed into South Carolina, one of the men whose sermons had sent the Rocky Creek riflemen to Hanging Rock and to King's Mountain and to a dozen smaller engagements that were individually insignificant and collectively maddening.

An incendiary. A rebel. A man to be questioned and disposed of.

What he saw, when they brought the prisoner into the anteroom of the Winnsboro headquarters on that December morning, was a man of fifty-one who stood as though the room belonged to him.

Not arrogance. Phillips had seen arrogance — the affected contempt of men who were afraid and were using arrogance to manage the fear. This was not that. This was something simpler and in some ways more difficult to deal with: the bearing of a

man who had decided, at some point far enough in the past that the decision had become part of his posture, that he stood before no human authority as a suppliant.

His hair was entirely white. He was coatless — they had taken his coat, standard procedure, which Phillips had not rescinded because he had not thought to and was now, looking at the man in the December cold of the anteroom, wishing he had. His hands were large and rough and entirely steady. He looked at Phillips with grey eyes that were doing the thing eyes do when a person is genuinely observing rather than performing observation — moving, taking in, processing, arriving at conclusions that the face did not immediately disclose.

And then Phillips recognised him.

Not with certainty at first. Not the immediate recognition of a man you have met in a drawing room or across a table. The recognition of a voice heard in the open air, a figure seen from a distance across a Carolina clearing, a name spoken around him by men who regarded the name with the particular combination of respect and wariness that the back country reserved for those it considered genuinely formidable. He had heard William Martin preach. Twice, at least — once at the Jackson Creek meetinghouse, which was within Phillips's own district when he had first arrived in the Carolinas in the early '70s and there was no episcopal service and once in the open air at a gathering he had ridden past on the road between Chester and Fishing Creek, pulling up his horse at the edge of the crowd simply because the voice carrying across the clearing was of such quality that it arrested motion. The voice was unmistakeable — a large man's voice, deep-timbred, carrying the flat vowels of the Scots in Ulster unchanged by the years of Amer-

ican usage. Phillips had stayed twenty minutes at the edge of that crowd before the press of other business moved him on.

How Martin had become an old man!

He had never spoken to Martin then. He was not certain Martin had ever noticed him.

He was quite certain Martin had not expected to see him here.

"*Reverend Martin*," Phillips said.

The old man looked at him steadily. "*Colonel*." He gave him the respect of his commission under King George.

His accent was Irish. Of course it was Irish — but more than that, it was Scotch-Irish, the sound of the land from which John Phillips had departed in 1770, a decade ago now, long enough for the accent to have been largely smoothed from his own speech by years of Militia service, episcopal worship and the deliberate cultivation of an officer's diction, but not long enough — never long enough — for him to fail to recognise it in another man's mouth.

"*Sit down please*," Phillips said.

"*I'll stand, thank ye*."

Phillips looked at him. He was aware of Griffiths in the doorway, of the two soldiers at the far wall, of the fire in the grate that was making inadequate progress against the December cold. He was aware that this interview had, within its first minute, taken a shape he had not anticipated.

"*As you like*,",he said.

John Phillips had been born in Ahoghill, County Antrim, in 1739.

This was not information he distributed widely, and in the present circumstances — a loyalist officer in a war in which County Antrim men were to be found killing each other at close quarters with a thoroughness that suggested the old country's grievances had been efficiently exported along with its inhabitants — it was information he managed with particular care. He had left Ireland at thirty-one, which was ten years ago, and had arrived in the Carolinas with loyalist sympathies formed by his education and by his family's long connection to the Anglo-Irish establishment, a connection embodied most specifically in his father's work: the training of horses.

His father had trained racehorses in County Antrim for thirty years. He had trained them for various members of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, and among his most distinguished clients, in the years when Phillips was a boy old enough to watch the horses being worked in the morning light, had been the Cornwallis family. The Earl Cornwallis — the General's father — had sent horses to be schooled under the elder Phillips on three occasions that Phillips could remember, and the relationship had been characterised by the specific mutual respect that horse people extend to one another across class lines when the shared subject is sufficient to dissolve, temporarily, the distance of rank.

Lord Cornwallis knew the Phillips name. Had known it since childhood. When John Phillips arrived in South Carolina and found himself drawn, by training and conviction and the practical matter of whose side would actually protect his land, to the Loyalist militia, the Phillips name had smoothed certain paths that might otherwise have been less smooth.

He had served under various commanders. He had served, in the summer of 1780, under Captain Christian Huck.

This was the part of his service he thought about least and would have preferred not to think about at all.

Huck was a Philadelphia lawyer and a Loyalist militia officer and he was known throughout the back country for the specific quality of his methods, which were designed not merely to suppress rebellion but to demonstrate what suppression looked like in terms that could not be misread. He despised the Scots and loathed the Presbyterians. Phillips had ridden with him because the militia structure required it and because refusing an assignment was not, in the summer of 1780, a straightforward matter. He had watched things he had not been able to prevent and had carried the watching since.

The worst of it had been at Little Rocky Creek.

Archibald McClurkin was a Covenanter who had come to Carolina in Martin's party — Phillips knew this, had heard the name in the district, knew of the family. When Huck's party came to Little Rocky Creek, McClurkin was in his bed with a fever. Not a mild fever — the kind of fever that makes a man's skin look like something has burned underneath it, the kind that takes men in their prime in the Carolina summer heat. He was in no condition to resist anything. He was in no condition to stand.

Tarleton's orders, filtered through Huck, did not make provision for condition.

They dragged Archibald McClurkin from his sickbed and hanged him in the yard of his own house for his Whig activities, and Phillips sat on his horse and looked at the Carolina sky and

felt the specific moral nausea that a man feels when he is present at something that cannot be undone and was done in his name.

He had not hanged Archibald McClurkin.

He had not prevented the hanging of Archibald McClurkin.

These two facts sat side by side in him and did not resolve. They had not resolved in the months since. He doubted they would resolve.

What had happened in the weeks after Huck's killing of McClurkin was that Colonel John Winn had captured several Loyalist officers in the Chester district. Phillips had been among them. Winn was a man of a particular kind — a Patriot officer who distinguished between combatants and those guilty only of being on the wrong side at the wrong moment, and who had made it known that prisoners under his command were to be treated accordingly. Phillips had been held for several weeks and had not been harmed and had eventually been released in an exchange. Winn had shown him a specific mercy and Phillips knew the weight of specific mercy — it was heavier than the diffuse goodwill that good people sometimes spoke of, heavier because it was personal and chosen and had cost something.

He owed John Winn.

He had not known, until this morning, that the debt would come due in this particular form.

"*You're from Antrim*," Phillips said.

He said it quietly, not as an official question but as a statement between men, and the shift in register was deliberate. He saw Martin register the shift — the slight adjustment in the grey eyes, the recalibration that a careful man makes when the conversation changes its nature.

"*My congregation wis in Antrim*," Martin said. "B*ut I wis born in the Fishmongers' lands near Lough Foyle.*" A pause. "Y*e might ken the area.*"

"*I don't know it well*," Phillips said. "*I'm from Ahoghill.*"

The silence that followed was the silence of two men from Ulster standing in a requisitioned house in South Carolina in December, which is a silence with its own specific content — the content of a country they have both left, by different roads and for different reasons, and which neither of them carries lightly.

"*I heard you preach*," Phillips said. "*At Jackson Creek. And once on the road from Chester — I stopped my horse.*"

Martin looked at him for a moment. "*I dae mind.*"

"*I did not think you would have. I was at the edge of the crowd." He paused. "It was the forty-sixth Psalm. You preached it without notes, I am not a man for the meetinghouse, I was of the Church at home, but at that time it was a word to my widower's heart burdened with sorrow.*"

Something moved in Martin's face. Not softness — he was not a man who did softness, from what Phillips had observed and what the past minutes had confirmed. Something more complex. The specific expression of a man who has received an unexpected piece of information and is assessing what to do with it.

"*God is oor refuge and oor strength*," Martin said quietly. "*A verra present help in trouble*."

"*Yes*," Phillips said with a distracted observation.

He went to the fire. He stood before it and looked at the flames and gave himself the moment that the fire permitted.

Then he turned around.

"*I am going to ask you some questions, he said, and I would ask you to answer them honestly*."

"*I'll answer them honestly*," Martin said. "*Whether I answer them tae yer satisfaction is a different matter*."

He asked about the War Sermon first, because it was the most documented and the most serious charge and the one that Cornwallis's staff had built the case around. Martin did not deny it. He acknowledged the sermon, its content, its date, its congregation, and its consequence in the mustering of sixty-four men who joined the Patriot forces the following day. He acknowledged all of this with the directness of a man who has spent five months in custody and arrived at a position of having nothing further to protect.

He acknowledged it and he did not regret it.

"*You understand*," Phillips said carefully, "t*hat the sermon is the primary charge against you*."

"*I understand it perfectly. The British airmy considers a Presbyterian minister preachin the counsel o' God tae his congregation tae be sedition. I consider the British airmy's opinion o' my preachin tae be irrelevant tae the question o' whether the preachin wis richt*."

"*That is not a defence that Lord Cornwallis will find compelling*." He said.

"*I'm no offerin it as a defence.*" Martin looked at him steadily. "I*'m offerin it as the truth. Ye said ye wanted honest answers.*"

Phillips looked at him. He thought about Huck. He thought about McClurkin dragged from a sickbed with a fever on him. He thought about the specific moral calculus of a war in which the back-country Scots-Irish were killing each other over the same grievances they had imported from the same county, Anglican and Presbyterian and about what it meant that the man standing before him was from the Foyle and that he himself was from Ahoghill and that they had ended up on opposite sides of this thing for reasons that had less to do with principle than with which roads each of them had taken after leaving the same country.

He asked about the sixty-four men. Martin acknowledged them.

He asked about specific militia actions. Martin acknowledged what he knew and declined to name names with a stillness that communicated, without a word of defiance, that names were not available.

He asked about the Declaration of Independence — whether Martin considered it a legitimate act of governance. Martin said he considered it a document entirely consistent with the Covenanting position on the conditional nature of earthly authority and the superior sovereignty of Christ over all nations, and that he had said so in his pulpit, and that he was prepared to say so again.

"*You are not making this easy*," Phillips said.

"*I'm no tryin tae mak it easy. I'm tryin tae mak it true.*"

Phillips sat down lifted the papers and examined the charges. He looked at the man.

He thought about his father's horses running in the Antrim morning. He thought about Lord Cornwallis's father on a visit to Ireland, watching them work, standing at the fence with the particular attention of a horseman who respects what he is seeing. He thought about the specific use of that memory — whether it was available to him, whether the connection between a County Antrim stable yard and a requisitioned house in South Carolina was a connection that could be made to carry the weight he needed it to carry.

He thought about John Winn's mercy.

He thought about Archibald McClurkin.

He set the papers down.

"*There is something I need to tell you, he said, before we go in.*"

Martin looked at him.

"*Archibald McClurkin*," Phillips said. "F*rom Little Rocky Creek. He came with you on the Lord Dunluce.*"

A stillness came over Martin's face. A different stillness from the steady composure of the questioning — the stillness of a man who has just heard the name of the dead and is gathering himself before the name's full weight arrives.

"*He did,*" Martin said.

"*He was ill,*" Phillips said. "*He was in his bed with a fever. I want you to know that I was present and that I did not prevent what happened and that I have carried that since.*" He said it plainly, the way a man states a thing that has been requiring statement for a long time. "*It was Huck's doing. But I was there.*"

A long silence.

Martin looked at him with the grey eyes. He was assessing something — not for personal consequence, Phillips thought, but in the way a minister assesses the condition of a person he is responsible for, which is a particular kind of attention that has nothing to do with judgment.

"*I ken the family*," Martin said at last.

"*Yes.*"

"*His mither also came on the Lord Dunluce. She is still at Little Rocky Creek.*" A pause. "*Or was.*"

"*I know*," Phillips said.

"*What dae ye want frae me, Colonel?*"

Phillips looked at him. "*Nothing. I'm not telling you for your absolution. I'm telling you because it's true and because you are his minister and because he deserved to have someone say it aloud.*" He paused. "*And because I think you should know what kind of man you will be standing in front of when we go into that room. Not Cornwallis. I mean what kind of man I am.*"

Martin considered this for a moment. Then: "*I ken what kind o' man ye are, he said. Ye're an Ahoghill man that has been daein things ye kent were wrang because the alternative wisnae straightforward. That is a condition I recognise. It disnae require my absolution, as ye say. It requires yer repentance, which is a matter between ye and God and is no my business the day.*"

Phillips received this. It landed, as Martin's things apparently landed, with a directness that did not bruise because it was entirely accurate.

"*Can ye dae onything for the Winn boys wi' Cornwallis?*" Martin asked.

"*I believe I can*," Phillips said. "*My father trained horses for his family in Antrim. Cornwallis knows the Phillips name. He has extended me a hearing in the past that rank alone would not have justified.*" He paused. "*I will use it.*"

"*Why?*"

Phillips looked at him for a long moment. He thought about John Winn's mercy. He thought about Archibald McClurkin's fever. He thought about a voice at the edge of a Carolina clearing, preaching the forty-sixth Psalm without notes, making the Psalm alive for twenty minutes in a man who had not been in a church in four years.

"*Because Winn showed me a mercy I did not earn*," he said. "A*nd because your people have been made to suffer things they should not have been made to suffer. And because*—" He stopped.

"*Because?*"

"*Because my father would not have wanted me to be the man I have been this summer,*" Phillips said quietly. "A*nd it is late to stop being that man. But it is not yet too late.*"

Martin looked at him for a long time.

"*Then lat us gang in*," he said.

The room where Cornwallis received them was the front room of the house — a plain room, adequate to its purpose, a fire against the December cold and maps on the table that Cornwallis turned from as they entered. He was a man of middle age and evident intelligence, wearing an ill-fitting and battle worn wig that was distracting to the eye for one in such authority. Yet under it he had the bearing of a soldier who has learned that

bearing is a form of authority and that authority, properly maintained, reduces the need for its cruder expressions. He looked at Phillips. He looked at Martin. He looked at the file that Griffiths had placed on the table.

"*Colonel Phillips*," he said.

"*My lord.*" Phillips stood correctly. "T*he prisoner is the Reverend William Martin, minister of the Reformed Presbyterian congregation at Rocky Creek, Chester district. He has been in custody since June on charges of preaching sedition and inciting armed resistance.*" He paused. "*I have examined him at length, my lord. I believe his case warrants your personal attention.*"

Cornwallis looked at Phillips with the particular attention of a man who knows what it means when someone he trusts says warrants your personal attention. He knew the Phillips name — Phillips had known he would. The elder Phillips' horses had run in the Cornwallis stables and the memory of good horses well-trained was a thing that men of that world did not set aside. He had listened to Phillips before. He listened now.

He looked at Martin.

Martin looked back at him with the grey eyes, standing erect, his white hair uncovered, his large hands quiet at his sides. If he was afraid, Phillips could not see it. He had thought, conducting the examination in the anteroom, that what he was witnessing was a performance of composure. He no longer thought that. It was not a performance. It was simply what the man was — what twenty five years of holding the ground had made him, what five months of custody had refined, what the morning at the brush-pile with Minor Winn in full view of the gallows had completed.

Cornwallis said: "*You are charged with preaching rebellion from the pulpit — you, an old man and a minister of the gospel of peace — with advocating rebellion against your lawful sovereign, King George the Third. What have you to say in your defence?*"

Martin said: "*I am happy tae appear afore ye. I wis raised as a Scot in Ireland; educated in its literary and theological schools; wis settled in Ireland, whaur I spent the prime o' my days and emigrated tae this country seven year ago.*"

He said it standing. He said it without raising his voice. He said it in the voice that Phillips had heard at the edge of a Carolina clearing — large, measured, the Ulster in it deep as the bone — and he said it as a man says the thing he has always believed and has never been uncertain about, not as a performance of belief but as the simple statement of what is the case.

"*For many month I hae been held in chains for preachin what I believe tae be the truth. As tae King George, I owe him naethin but guid will. I am no unacquainted wi' his private character. As a king, he wis bound tae protect his subjects in the enjoyment o' their richts. Protection and allegiance gang thegither and whaur the one fails, the ither cannae be exacted.*"

Cornwallis was quiet for a moment.

"*Protection and allegiance*," he said. "*You speak as a lawyer, Reverend Martin, not as a minister.*"

"*I speak as a Covenanter,*" Martin said. "*We hae aye held that civil authority is conditional. That a king rules under God and for the benefit o' his subjects, and that when he fails in that trust, the obligation o' the subject is no unconditional. This is no a new argument. It is aulder than this war by a hunner year.*"

"*It is an argument*," Cornwallis said, "t*hat has cost a great many men their lives.*"

"*Aye*," Martin said. "I*t has. They considered it worth the cost. So dae I.*"

The room was quiet after it.

Cornwallis looked at the old man for a long moment. Then he looked at Phillips.

Martin seized the perceived liberty of the moment, man to man, both servants of a king, "*The Declaration o' Independence is but a reiteration o' what oor Covenantin faithers hae aye maintained. I am thankful ye hae gien me liberty tae speak, and will abide yer pleasure, whitever it may be.*"

Cornwallis stood. He walked to the window and stood with his back to the room for a moment — not, Phillips thought, from agitation, but in the manner of a man who is thinking and prefers not to be watched while he does it. Outside, the December street was quiet.

"*You say the Declaration is a reiteration of your forefathers' principles,*" Cornwallis said, without turning. "*I put it to you that your forefathers' principles were the principles of sedition in Scotland, of sedition in Ireland, and are now the principles of sedition in this colony. The pattern is consistent, Reverend Martin, if nothing else.*"

"*The pattern is consistent,*" Martin agreed, and there was in his voice something that was not quite amusement but was in that vicinity. "*We hae been sayin the same thing for a hunner and thirty year. We said it at the Pentland Hills and at Drumclog and at Airds Moss and at the Sanquhar Cross. We said it in Ulster when the landlords raised the rents past what a man could pay and feed his weans on the same ground. We said it here, my lord, when yer airmy came through this county and hanged men frae their ain trees and burned the libraries o' their ministers*

and shot a boy o' nineteen in his faither's barnyard and made his mither watch as they dishonoured his corpse."

He said this last without raising his voice. The flatness of it was, Phillips thought, more effective than any elevation would have been.

Cornwallis turned from the window.

"*You refer to incidents in the conduct of the pacification," he said carefully*, "*of which I am aware and which are — not uncomplicated.*"

A silence.

Cornwallis looked at him steadily.

"*You are not afraid*," he said. It was an observation, not a question.

"*I have been in chains since June,*" Martin said. "*Whitever fear I had, my lord, has been considerably reduced by the precedin months.*"

"*And yet you are here.*"

"*And yet I am here*," Martin said. "*Which suggests that God hasnae yet finished wi' me. Or wi' this country. I am content tae leave the question o' which it is tae His determination.*"

Cornwallis looked at him for a long moment. Then he looked at Phillips.

Phillips said nothing. He had said what he had to say. He stood correctly and waited.

"*The Declaration of Independence*," Cornwallis said, returning to Martin, "*is an act of treason against the Crown. I cannot hear you call it a Covenanting document and treat the observation as though it settles the matter.*"

"*It disnae settle the matter*," Martin said. "*Naethin will settle the matter until this war is concluded, and I dinnae ken hoo it will be concluded, and*

I suspect neither dae ye. What I can tell ye is what I telt my congregation frae that pulpit and what I will tell ony man that asks me: that Christ is King ower the nations, that earthly kings rule under his authority and are accountable tae it, and that a king that uses his authority tae destroy the people he wis gien it tae protect has violated the terms o' his ain sovereignty. That is the Covenantin position. The men that drafted the Declaration didnae need tae consult us — they arrived at the same conclusions by their ain road."

"*You would make a formidable advocate*," Cornwallis said, with something that might, in other circumstances, have passed for dry admiration.

Cornwallis looked at him for the last time — that long, assessing look of a man who has made a decision and is confirming it against the evidence one final time.

Phillips said nothing. He had said what he needed to say in the anteroom. He had given Cornwallis the assessment and the context and the recommendation and the information about John Winn's brother, Colonel Richard Winn's explicit warning — that if the Winns and Martin were executed, he would hang the first hundred British officers and soldiers who fell into his hands, which was the kind of warning that a military commander could not entirely dismiss regardless of his opinion of its author. He had given Cornwallis all of this and now he stood and waited.

Cornwallis looked at the maps on the table for a moment.

Then he looked back at Martin. He said: "*Reverend Martin, you have said your piece plainly, which is more than most men in your position manage.*" A pause. "*Colonel Phillips speaks well of you and I have reason to value Colonel Phillips's judgment in these matters.*" Another pause, longer. "*You will be released. You are warned, in the clearest*

possible terms, against any further incitement of armed resistance, any further preaching of sedition, any further—"

"*My lord*," Martin said, quietly, "*I will preach what I hae aye preached. I cannae offer ye a different assurance than that yin and I cannae by oath bind myself tae ony ither than my King that governs the rulers o' this world.*"

Cornwallis looked at him.

Phillips held his breath.

"*Get him out of here*," Cornwallis said. To Phillips, not to Griffiths. The distinction, Phillips understood, was intentional.

"*Yes, my lord,*" he said.

He walked Martin to the door of the headquarters.

Outside, the December air was cold and the Winnsboro street was quiet and Martin stood for a moment on the step and breathed it, the way a man breathes air that has been unavailable to him for a long time, not with drama but with the simple attention of a man whose body recognises something it has been missing.

Phillips stood beside him.

"*You'll go north, Phillips said. Mecklenburg? There are Covenanters there. Stay north of the Chester district until the spring at least.*"

"*I ken whaur tae go*," Martin said.

"*Yes, I know you do.*"

A silence. The street was empty. Somewhere behind them, in the headquarters, Cornwallis was back at his maps. Somewhere in the town, in whatever building they were holding him, Minor Winn and his brother were alive.

"*The McClurkin family*," Martin said. "*When this is over. When ye gang back.*"

"*To Jackson Creek? More likely to Antrim!*"

"*No. I meant the family here. At Little Rocky Creek.*" He looked at Phillips directly. "*Whitever ye can dae.*"

Phillips nodded.

Martin looked at him for a moment. The grey eyes did the thing they did — taking in, assessing, arriving at a conclusion — and whatever the conclusion was, it remained Martin's.

Cast thy bread upon the waters, he said, for thou shalt find it after many days.

Then he walked down the step and into the Winnsboro street, a large man in a borrowed coat with his Bible under his arm, heading north into the December Carolina morning and the long road back to whatever remained of Rocky Creek.

Phillips stood on the step and watched him go.

He thought about his father's horses in the Antrim morning. He thought about the specific mercy of John Winn. He thought about Archibald McClurkin and the fever and the yard and young Will Strong.

He thought: *it is late to stop being that man.*

He thought: *but it is not yet too late.*

He went back inside.

He wrote to his mother that evening.

He did not mention the interview. He wrote about the campaign, in terms suited to a letter that would pass through military post, and he asked after the family and the farm and the horses and the general state of County Antrim, and at the end, in a postscript he almost struck out and did not, he wrote:

Do our neighbours still sing the Psalms at the Ahoghill meeting? I find myself thinking of it. These people here are our same neighbours.

He sent the letter.

He stood at the window of the house and looked out at the December dark, the Carolina back country quiet around him, and thought about the forty-sixth Psalm preached in a Carolina field and about what it meant that the man who had preached it was now walking north in the dark toward Rocky Creek and about whether what had happened in the front room today was providence or politics or simply the specific leverage of a rebel's threat or a stable yard in County Antrim applied at the right moment to the right situation.

He concluded, standing at the window, that it was all four and that the four were not in contradiction.

Somewhere out in the dark, Martin was walking north.

Phillips could not see him.

He could feel the direction of him, though — north, toward the burned meetinghouse and the scattered congregation and the work he had crossed an ocean to do, which no British general's warning was going to conclude, and which was proceeding, step by step in the December dark, according to purposes that did not require the approval of Lord Cornwallis or the protection of a colonel from Ahoghill.

Though it had used both.

That was the thing, Phillips thought, turning from the window. That was the thing about the God this man preached — He used what was available. He cast bread upon the waters. He trained horses in County Antrim thirty years before they were needed in a front room in South Carolina, and He put a Covenanting minister in the centre of a crowd on a Carolina road where a young man from Ahoghill happened to pull up his horse and listen for twenty minutes, how his heart had warmed to the word of God.

Seeds of providence sown?

He filed these things away against the day they would be required. But he knew his days in America were over.

He went to his saddlebag and withdrew his Bible — his mother's Bible, barely opened in ten years — and found the forty-sixth Psalm and read it by the lamplight.

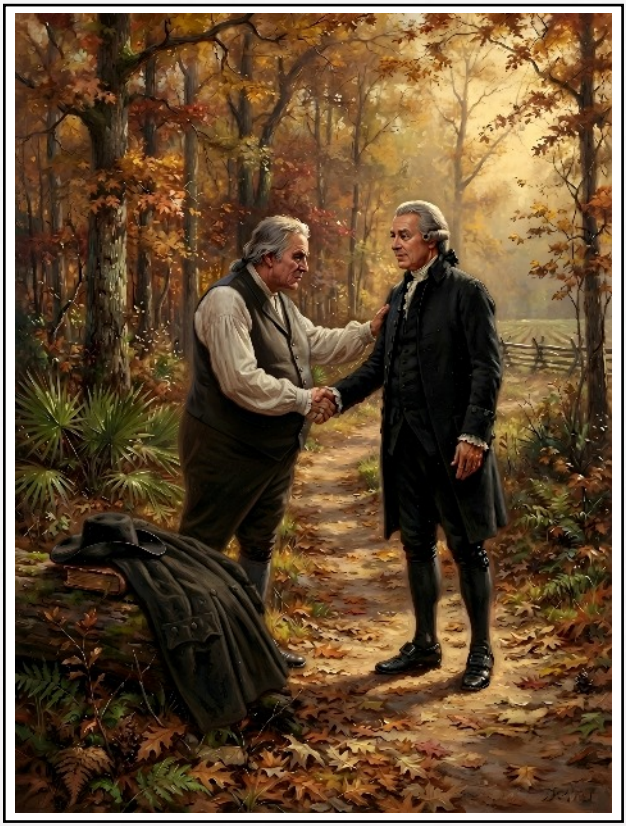
God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

He read it to the end.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. He maketh wars to cease.

He sat for a long time with it open in front of him.

Then he closed it, and blew out the lamp, and went to bed.



"standing on the path in the October morning with the forest around us and fifteen years between us" Page 215

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Woodland Path

Near Richburg, Chester County, South Carolina — Autumn, 1787

Reverend Matthew Lynn, Associate Reformed Presbyterian minister

I had not seen him in fifteen years.

The arithmetic of this was not difficult but the fact of it was, in the way that all such facts are — the ones you have been carrying at a distance, telling yourself you will address when the occasion presents itself, only to discover that the occasion has been presenting itself for fifteen years and you have been, with considerable ingenuity, contriving not to notice.

The occasion had now presented itself in the form of an assignment from the Associate Reformed Presbytery. I had been appointed to visit Chester County, South Carolina, to preach at the congregations there recently joined to the union and to encourage those still deliberating. My brother John's farm near Richburg was the natural base for the work — John had come on the Lord Dunluce in Martin's party, had been a faithful member of the congregation for fourteen years, and had now, after the careful consideration of a man who does not move quickly but moves permanently when he moves at all, submitted to the call of the union and brought his family into the Associate Reformed congregation.

John's farm neighboured William Martin's plantation by perhaps a mile of woodland path along the north fork of Big Rocky Creek. I had known this before I accepted the appointment. I accepted it anyway, because the appointment was legitimate and the work was necessary and because I am old

enough to know that avoiding a thing does not reduce its weight — it simply distributes the weight differently, loading it onto the future rather than the present, and the future has enough of its own.

I had told myself I would call on him formally. That I would ride to the plantation, present myself at the door, conduct the visit as a ministerial courtesy between old colleagues. I had been in Chester County three days before I understood that this was not how it was going to happen.

I found him on the woodland path.

He was walking — simply walking, without apparent destination, in the October morning with the Carolina forest around him at its most generous, the hardwoods turning in that particular way they turn in a southern autumn, less dramatic than the New England colour I had heard described but deeper somehow, more amber than crimson, as though the heat of the summer were being slowly released rather than abruptly surrendered. He was large — larger than I remembered, or perhaps I had simply been remembering him at forty-three and he was now fifty-eight and the years had added a heaviness that was not infirmity but settlement, the specific weight of a man whose body has been doing hard work for a long time and is bearing the record of it.

He looked old.

He was not wearing his coat. This surprised me, the October morning being cool. He had his hat on and a Bible under his arm in the manner I had known for thirty years — the left arm,

always the left arm, as though his right were being kept free for some purpose that might present itself.

He saw me when I came around the bend in the path.

He stopped.

I stopped.

We looked at each other across perhaps twenty feet of woodland path, two men in their late fifties who had been ordained in the same tradition by the same hands at the same river thirty years ago, and who had arrived at the same October morning by entirely different roads.

"*Matthew*," he said.

"*William,*" I said.

Then we were shaking hands — his grip the same grip it had always been, the transfer of weight, the same intentional pressure — and standing on the path in the October morning with the forest around us and fifteen years between us and an extraordinary quantity of things that required saying, which neither of us was going to say first.

"*I heard ye were at John's*," he said.

"*Aye. Three days.*"

"*And ye didnae come.*"

The directness of it — the same directness, unchanged, time had not softened it any more than it had softened his grip. I received it as it was intended, which was not as accusation but as observation, the statement of a fact that deserved acknowledgment.

"*I wis comin*," I said. "*I wis workin up tae it.*"

Something moved in his face. Not quite a smile. You always did take longer to arrive than your schedule suggested.

"*An ye aye started the meetin afore everybody wis seated.*"

A pause. And then — unexpected, genuinely unexpected — he laughed. A brief thing, quickly over, but real.

"*Come then*," he said. "*Walk wi' me.*"

We walked in silence for a time, which is what two men do when they have too much to say and are establishing which of it is going to be said first. The path followed the line of the creek, the water visible in glimpses through the trees, running clear over the flat rock.

"*Hoo lang are ye here?* he asked.

"*A fortnight, mebbe three week. There is preachin tae dae at several congregations.*"

"*Associate?*"

"*Aye.*"

He said nothing to this. He walked with his hands behind his back, the Bible transferred to the right arm now, and looked at the path ahead with the expression of a man who is not going to begin the argument but is not going to avoid it either.

"*John has gone in*," he said, at length.

"*He has.*"

"*I ken it.*" He told me himself. A pause. "*He did me the courtesy o' that, at least.*"

I noted the at least and stored it.

"*He wrestled wi' it*," I said.

"*I dinnae doubt it. John is a man o' conscience.*" A further pause. "*But a man o' conscience that arrives at the wrang conclusion has still arrived at the wrang conclusion.*"

"*Ye think the union is the wrang conclusion.*"

"*I ken the union is the wrang conclusion. I kent it afore it wis formed and I ken it noo and the five year since its formin hae no provided ony evidence that wad alter my assessment.*" He glanced at me sideways. "*The Seceders in Britain opposed us for disownin the King. The same Seceders in America found it convenient tae cooperate wi' us because oor position on the Revolution wis useful tae them. The moment the Constitution wis adopted, what happened?*"

I said nothing. I knew what happened.

"*The Constitution maks nae acknowledgment o' Christ's kingship,*" he said. "*Nae acknowledgment o' the Covenants. Nae acknowledgment o' the obligation that descends tae the nations frae the Solemn League. The Presbytery endorsed a union wi' men that can accept a Christless constitution and call it adequate. I couldnae hae endorsed it then and I cannae endorse it noo.*"

"*John Cuthbertson endorsed it*," I said. "*He spent twenty-two year bigginin the work in Pennsylvania. He wis a wiser man in this matter than—*"

"*Cuthbertson*," Martin said, quietly but with a weight that stopped my sentence, "*had been movin toward this for twenty year. He swore fidelity tae the cause o' the colonists in '77 and has been lookin for a theological shelter for that action ever since. The union provided the shelter. It disnae mak the shelter soond.*"

I thought about what to say to this. I had thought about it before coming south — had rehearsed, in fact, the arguments

that seemed to me most defensible, most likely to open rather than close the conversation. What I had not adequately prepared for was the specific quality of Martin's arguments, which were the same quality they had always been: not the arguments of a man constructing a position but the arguments of a man reporting on what he had observed.

"*The position on the American constitution*," I said carefully, "*is a matter on which guid men can differ. The Seceders had accepted it. We found, in discussion, that there wis sufficient common ground*—"

"*Matthew.*" He said my name the way he had always said it when he was about to set aside the courtesies and address the substance. "*Ye and I hae kent each ither since '59. Ye were my elder afore ye were my colleague. Ye ken what the common ground is and what it isnae. The American constitution is no a covenanted document. The civil government it establishes maks nae profession o' the Mediatorial Kingship o' Christ. Yer Presbytery*—" he corrected himself — "*the Associate Reformed Presbytery has accepted membership o' a union that worships under a government it has no required tae acknowledge its dependence upon Christ. That is no a matter o' guid men differin. That is a matter o' the Covenant bein set aside for the sake o' institutional convenience.*"

The path turned along the creek. A kingfisher — the same vivid implausibility as the Ulster bird, though a different species — shot across the water and was gone.

"*And the result*," he said, more quietly, "*is that I am staundin here.*"

He said it without self-pity. That was the thing that made it land more heavily than self-pity would have done.

We came to a fallen log at the creek's edge and stopped there, in the wordless agreement that men who have walked together

before make about where to sit. The October sun was finding its angle on the water.

"*Ye hae been hame? Tell me aboot Ulster,*" he said.

It was a request for something other than the argument. I received it as such.

"*The Volunteers are growin,*" I said. "*The sentiment is everywhaur — the French Revolution has gien it a new language and a new urgency. There are men in the Presbyterian kirks that are in correspondence wi' the Society o' United Irishmen. Some o' them are Reformed Presbyterian men — or were.*"

He was very still. "*Stavely*?"

"*Stavely is careful. He is sympathetic tae the reform movement but careful.*" I paused. "*Ithers are less careful. There will be trouble, William. The tide is runnin too fast and there are men ridin it that hae no considered what happens when it turns.*"

Martin looked at the creek. "*The Killin Times taught us that the tide aye turns,*" he said. "*The question is no whether it will turn but what ye billdit on the ground afore it did.*"

"*Aye.*" I thought about Stavely — careful, capable, maintaining the Irish church through a decade that had depleted it on every side. The Irish church is holding. It has held through worse.

"*What I wonder — what I hae wondered since I left — is whether the men that stayed understood what they were haudin. Whether they understood that the inheritance I left wi' them wis worth mair than the reform movement's promises.*" He said this without bitterness, but without detachment either. It was the question of a man who has been three thousand miles away and has had no way of knowing the answer.

"*William Stavely understands it*," I said.

He nodded, slowly. "*I believe that.*"

I told him then about the state of the Covenanting church in Ireland — the congregations, the challenges, the steady pressure from the Secession Church which continued to absorb those on the margins of the Covenanting position. I told him about the society meetings in the townlands I had visited on my last journey home, the familiar names, the singing of the Psalms in rooms that smelled of peat and the specific industry of women who have decided that the minister needs feeding.

However, when I was back in Ulster I had met Stavely and we disagreed in my decision to set down the cause of the Martyrs. He would not see it as its fulfilment in which it gave the opportunity to take a full part in this great nation, an experiment in liberty. Yet liberty in the hand of sinful man can be an idol. But I challenged him about the Irish Volunteers who spoke of *Liberty* to poor Irishmen of all creeds. Stavely was defensive.

But I did not tell Martin of this meeting.

He listened to all of it without interrupting, which was unusual for him. He listened with the attention of a man receiving news from a country he will not see again and is aware that this is one of the last opportunities to receive it from someone who has been there recently.

"*Carnaughts,*" he said, when I had finished.

"*Still staundin. The mill on the Kellswater. Yer folk are there.*"

He was quiet for a moment. "*My folk*," he said, softly. Not possessively. With the tenderness of a man who knows the phrase is no longer accurate in the practical sense and holds

onto it anyway, the way you hold onto a thing that is not legally yours but was yours once and the having of it was formative.

"*And Ballyspallan?*" he said.

"*I wis in Newtownlimvady and speirt efter yer brither's family.*" I paused. "*Some o' them. The young yins hae gone tae America.*"

"*They aye gang tae America*," he said. "T*hat is the great direction o' the age. I thocht, when we cam, that we were comin tae a country that wad be different. That the distance wad matter — that crossin the watter wad pit somethin ahent us that had been follaein us since Scotland.*"

"*And?*"

He turned to look at me directly. "*The distance didnae matter. The follaein thing cam also. Different claes but the same follaein thing — the rack-rent in a new form, the oath in a new form, the question o' whether a man can haud his principles in a warld that is aye offerin him a mair convenient alternative.*"

I thought about that for a moment.

"*The accusation*," I said. "*At Dungiven. Dae ye ever think aboot it?*"

He was surprised by the shift — I saw it — and then not surprised. "*Occasionally. Why?*"

"*I hae thocht aboot it mair than occasionally*," I said. "*Particularly since comin sooth. Seein what has become o' things here — the dissolution, the union, the congregations movin intae the Associate Presbytery — it comes tae me sometimes that the accusation wis the beginnin o' aw o' it. That if the slur had no attached itself tae my name, I micht no hae left Ireland. Micht hae stayed. And if I had stayed, the presbytery micht hae held differently through the war years.*"

Martin considered this with the seriousness it deserved. "*No*," he said, at length. "*The accusation didnae mak the union. The union*

wis made by men that had decided, afore the accusation and afore yer emigration, that the fu' Covenantin position wis mair than the American situation required. They accommodated themselves tae the Revolution and then they accommodated themselves tae the Christless Constitution and then they accommodated themselves tae the Seceders and at each step the accommodation seemed reasonable in itsel." He paused. "T*hat is hoo positions are lost. No in one great betrayal but in mony smaa accommodations, each o' which can be justified at the moment o' its makin.*"

"*Ye think the union wis a betrayal.*"

"*I think the union wis a series o' accommodations that arrived, in combination, at somethin that cannae be honestly ca'd the Covenantin position. In the face o' tyranny I defended the declaration trustin that guid men wad come on their knees tae Christ and bind the nation under His kingship wi' a new covenant an American renovation o' the covenants. But like the day o' relief it wis cast aside like King Charles burnin them at Tyburn.*"

"*And yet*," I said, "c*arefully, the men that made it are no dishonest men. Cuthbertson is no a dishonest man. Alexander Dobbin is no a dishonest man.*" I paused. "*I am no a dishonest man.*"

"*No*," he said. "*Ye are no.*" He said it plainly, without the softening I had half-expected, and the plainness was its own kind of respect. "*Ye are a man that made a decision I believe wis wrang and hae lived wi' the decision honestly. I dinnae think ye dishonest. I think ye mistaken.*"

We sat with this for a moment.

"*The Associate Reformed Presbytery accepts the American constitution*," I said. "*We accept the civil government as it has been constituted by the people. That disnae mean we hae abandoned the claim o' Christ's kingship*

— it means we hae found a wey tae operate within an imperfect civil order while maintainin oor witness tae what that order ocht tae be."

"*That is the argument that has been made tae justify every accommodation since the Restoration," Martin said. "Operatin within an imperfect civil order while maintainin oor witness tae what it ocht tae be. Cameron and Cargill were offered that argument at the Sanquhar Cross. They declined it.*"

"*They were killed for declinin it.*"

"*Aye*," he said. "*They were.*"

The creek ran on. A heron moved from the far bank with the economy of motion that herons have, ancient and deliberate.

I said: "*The matter of slavery.*"

A silence of a different quality.

He did not look at me immediately. He looked at the heron until it had cleared the tree line and disappeared, and then he looked at the water.

"*What of it?*" he said.

"*It is — increasin*," I said, with the careful word that the careful subject required. "I*n the county. Amang the settlers. Amang some in the congregation.*"

"*I ken what it is in the county*," he said. "*I live in the county.*"

"*It isnae a matter that presents itself in the same wey in Pennsylvania*," I said. "*The labour situation here is different. The land—*"

"*Matthew.*" The direct address again. "A*re ye gonnae tell me that slavery is different here than in Pennsylvania because the land is different?*"

I felt the inadequacy of what I had been about to say and stopped.

"*I am tellin ye*," I said, more carefully, "*that the situation is complex and that the Presbytery has no yet arrived at a definitive rulin and that the men in my congregations here are — they are no cruel men. They are men that hae found themselves in a labour arrangement that their faithers wadnae hae recognised and that*"

"*That is slavery*," Martin said. "*The word isnae improved by avoidin it.*"

I said nothing.

He turned to look at me. He paused. "*But I will tell ye this, Matthew — the man that accommodates himself tae slavery because it is the custom o' the country in which he finds himself is makin exactly the same argument as the man that accommodates himself tae a Christless constitution because it is the document o' the nation in which he finds himself. The accommodation is the same accommodation. Only the subject differs.*"

I thought about my congregations. About the men in them — solid, serious, Scots-Irish men who had built their farms with their hands and whose fathers had done the same and who had, in the past years, as the frontier moved west and the labour shortage developed, taken on one or two or six slaves in the way that the county had normalised without ever quite deciding to normalise.

I thought about what I had said to them. What I had not said to them.

"*Oor Presbytery hasnae ruled definitively on the matter,*" I said, again.

"*No,*" said Martin. "*It has not.*" And in the *has not* was everything that did not need to be added — the implication that a church which had accepted a Christless constitution and had not ruled

definitively on slavery was a church whose accommodations were compounding.

I did not argue with the implication. I could not honestly argue with it.

"*What about it onyway I'm taikin here but I hae nae presbytery, ony me like my ane Pope!*"

"*The war*," I said, at length. Because it was the other thing. The thing I had been walking around as surely as I had been walking around the meeting itself.

"*What about it?*"

"*There's them that say*—" I stopped. "*There's them that believe that yer involvement wisnae consistent wi' the Covenantin position. That the sermon wis*—"

"*I ken what they say.*" His voice had changed slightly. Not risen — he was not a man whose voice rose in anger, the anger in him always expressing itself as a more controlled and therefore more formidable quality. "T*hey say the same thing frae the safety o' Pennsylvania that they said frae the safety o' Philadelphia and the safety o' Scotland. That a Covenantin minister shouldnae hae preached his people tae war.*"

"*And?*"

"*And they werenae here.*" He said it simply, without heat. "T*hey werenae here when Tarleton's men killed Buford's troops at the Waxhaws under a flag o' truce and left them mutilated. They werenae here when Huck shot William Strong in his ain yard and made his mither watch. They werenae here when this county — thae families, thae weans, thae people I had brocht three thoosand mile frae a country whaur they were bein rack-rented intae the ground — they werenae here when thae people were telt that they maun tak an oath tae the Crown or hae their property*

confiscated and be subject tae summary execution." He paused. "*I looked at what Cameron and Cargill and Peden did in Scotland when the killin times cam. They preached. They didnae pretend that the preachin wisnae dangerous or that the consequences could be controlled. They said what the Scripture required and let the consequences follow.*"

"*Some o' yer men died*," I said. Gently. It was not an accusation.

"*Aye.*" He said it with the weight of a man who has counted the names. "*They died. William Anderson died.*"

He looked at the creek. "*I hae lived wi' that.*" A pause. "*I will tell ye what I telt myself in Camden jail and at the blockhoose and on the road tae Winnsboro, Matthew — the men o' this congregation didnae gang tae war tae advance a political notion. They went because the alternative wis tae watch their families be destroyed by a power that had already demonstrated what destruction looked like and intended tae demonstrate it further. That is self-defence. It is the same self-defence that Cameron preached at Airds Moss. I will no disown it.*"

"*Naebody is askin ye tae disown it.*"

"*Are they no?*" He looked at me directly. "*I hae been the sole Covenantin minister in America for five year. Five year, Matthew. My Presbytery dissolved itsel intae a union that I couldnae hae jyned. My former colleagues — men I ordained, men I trained, men I considered friends*—" He stopped. He reset himself, which was visible in the way it was always visible with him — the jaw, the breath, the deliberate returning to composure.

"*I dinnae say this*," he said, more quietly, "*as an accusation against ye. I say it as a fact that I hae been sittin wi'.*"

The forest was very quiet. The creek ran. The October light had moved, the sun higher now, the amber of the hardwoods catching it differently.

"*Ye should hae been consulted*," I said.

"*I wisnae present*," he said. "I *wis here, in a county that had been devastated. I wisnae available for the deliberations in Philadelphia. I ken that.*" A pause. "*But a man can ken the reasons for a thing and still feel the weight o' it.*"

I heard, in this, something I had not quite heard before — not the anger I had expected, not the doctrinal certainty I had always known, but something underneath both of them. Something that the anger and the certainty had been covering, or perhaps that they had always been covering and I had not previously been near enough to hear.

"*William*," I said.

"*Aye.*"

"*Are ye*—" I stopped. The question I wanted to ask was too direct even for us. I tried another approach. "*When I gang back north. When I report tae my Presbytery on the state o' the kirk o' Christ here. What should I tell them?*"

He thought about this for a moment. "*Tell them that the true Covenanted work continues*," he said. "*Tell them that the congregation at Richmond has its meetinhoose and its preachin and its sacraments administered, and that them that hae remained are haudin the ground that wis aye worth haudin.*" A pause. "*Tell them that William Martin sends his regards and hauds nae personal grievance against ony man.*"

"*I will tell them that.*"

"*And Matthew*—" He turned to look at me. "T*ell yer brither John I am glad he is weel. Whitever his decision. Tell him I am glad he is weel.*"

The note in it — the small, unguarded note in the last sentence — was the thing I had been hearing underneath everything else.

Not self-pity; I have said it was not self-pity. Something older and plainer than self-pity. The note of a man who has been the sole minister in a country for five years, who has watched his congregation leave for a denomination he could not follow them into, who had been his brother John's minister for fifteen years and was now his brother John's nearest neighbour and not his minister, not his colleague, not quite his anything anymore.

Who had been the father of the Irish Church and the first minister of the American Church and was now standing in a woodland in Chester County with the title of neither.

I did not know what to say to this. I am a man of some facility with words — thirty years of ministry will produce that, or ought to — and I did not know what to say.

I said: "*The work ye hae done isnae undone by what has followed it.*"

He looked at me for a moment. "*No*," he said. "I*t isnae undone. I ken that.*" He stood. He picked up his Bible and coat from the log where he had set them. He stood at the creek one more time. "*The ground holds*," he said. "*I believe that.*"

"*I believe it too*," I said, trying to justify it in my heart to my position.

We stood for a moment looking at the creek — two men from Ulster, ordained at the same river, separated by fifteen years and a church division that neither of us had wanted and neither of us had fully prevented — looking at the Carolina water going over the flat rock in the October morning.

"*I'll no keep ye frae yer preachin,*" he said.

"*An I'll no keep ye frae yer walkin.*"

He almost smiled. "*Aye.*"

We shook hands. The same grip. The transfer of weight. I held his hand a moment longer than the handshake required, and he let me, which was its own kind of statement.

Then he turned and walked back up the path the way he had come, his hat on and his Bible under his left arm, his large back to me, moving through the amber October forest with the measured tread of a man who has somewhere to be, though what that place was I could not have said, and whether he himself could have said it, I was not certain.

I watched him until the path turned and the trees took him.

I stood on the path for a while by myself.

Then I went back to John's farm, and sat in John's kitchen with John's wife's broth going cold in front of me, and composed in my head the report I would make to the Presbytery of the state of its work in Chester County, South Carolina, what would I say about the last Covenanter and his people a remnant?.

It was an honest report. I had learned honesty from William Martin in the Drummond barn in 1759, and I had not un-learned it since, whatever else I had and had not done.

I wrote that our work progressed well with many Covenanters finding ease of conscience and unity in our application of the Covenant to this republic.

I wrote that Martin sent his regards and held no personal grievance.

I did not write about the woodland path. Some things are not for the Presbytery's minutes. Some things belong to the path and the creek and the October light and the grip of a man's

hand, and are not improved by being rendered into the language of institutional record.

I wrote that the ground holds.

I believed it when I wrote it.

I believe it still.

We did not meet again.

Postscript November 1806

He died in October 1806 — I received the letter in the spring of 1807, forwarded from Philadelphia, written by my brother John's widow in the handwriting of one for whom writing is effortful. By then I had been over thirty years in America. The Irish covenanters had gone through the '98 and the men who had been sympathetic to the Volunteers had either fled or been imprisoned — Stavely, careful and surviving, James McKinney and Samuel Wylie fleeing to America and preaching in New York and Pennsylvania with the energy of men who had brought their enlightened sensibilities with them and found new expressions for them. The United Irishmen had risen and been crushed and the rising had been, as Martin predicted on the woodland path, a tide that turned and took with it many who had not considered what happens when tides turn.

James McKinney, from Kilrea had been mentored by Martin and answered a call to Rocky Creek in 1802 after Martin was deposed. He was to attempt the healing of a rift between the new minister Thomas Donnelly and the congregation. He achieved little.

I wonder if help had come before, whether I would have gone into the union? Or should I have gone south to my old colleague? There are always remnants and they sought a man. Martin was that man alone in the south but broken, I might have been that man in the north and I would be his Clerk once again, but those *boys* from Ireland were ardent and unpolished, they would not suit me. Things move on just as the stream under the October maples and pines.

Yet Martin had seen it coming. He had seen it coming from Ulster and seen it coming in Carolina and had preached against the accommodation, against the convenience, against the small yieldings that compound into large surrenders, and had been the sole minister in two countries, each time left holding the ground while others found more comfortable alternatives, and had held it. But I heard the charge that he had bought and sold a slave!

I did not think less of him.

I had stood in his congregation on the day he was ordained at the Vow, and watched the four hundred people of Ulster receive their minister and felt the thing pass through the crowd, the thing that has no name in ordinary language, and I thought then: he was made for this.

I still think that.

I think also that the thing a man is made for is not a comfortable thing to be made for, and that the cost of it goes deeper than the man who bears it knows, and that sometimes the cost does not show fully until you sit beside him on a log and hear, underneath the certainty and the doctrine and the righteous argument, the note that the certainty has been covering.

The note of a man alone.

Not abandoned — I will not say abandoned. Held, as he had always held and always preached that God holds.

But alone.

The ground holds.

I believe it.

But the man who holds the ground is still alone on it.

And that is not a small thing.

That is not a small thing at all.

"He continued.–But the county did not have a place for him anymore." Page 249

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Desert Place

Rocky Creek, South Carolina —1818

Mary Elder, aged seventy-three

I am going to tell you the truth about him.

Not the truth that gets preached at funerals, which is the truth of a man reduced to his best moments, his worst moments carefully folded and put away in a drawer that no one opens in public. Not the truth of the memorial sermon or the presbytery minutes or the letters that the younger ministers wrote about him in his last years, which were respectful and precise and missed the point the way that precise things often miss the point, like a map that has every road correctly drawn but cannot tell you what the road smells like in July.

I knew the Reverend William Martin for thirty-three years.

We are Covenanters from Octorara, and I was born into the Scots-Irish of Pennsylvania and I came to Rocky Creek with my husband James Elder in the late summer of '73, six months after the Antrim people arrived on the Lord Dunluce. We had come down the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania — James's family, the Elders, had been in Chester County, Pennsylvania for sixteen years, but James had heard from his cousin Matthew, lately arrived from home, about the Carolina land and about the minister who had come from Ulster to build a church in the back country and James was not a man who heard about something worth doing and stayed where he was when the something worth doing was elsewhere.

I had not wanted to come. This is important because it is the truth and the truth is what I am telling you.

I had not wanted to leave Lancaster, where I had my mother and my sisters and the particular known quality of a place where everything has a name and you know all the names. James said: "*there is grund, and a meenister, and a future.*" I said: "there is also grund and a meenister and a future in Lancaster County." We came anyway because James was that kind of man and I was the kind of woman who, having made her objections clearly and been overruled, got on the wagon and made the best of it and was eventually glad, though the eventually was a considerable time arriving.

I am glad now. I have been glad for many years.

But I want you to know I did not begin glad, because a woman who did not begin glad and arrived at glad by a long road has a different kind of gladness than the woman who was glad from the start and the difference is important when what you are trying to do is tell the truth.

I met Mr Martin the first Sabbath.

James had gone ahead to the meetinghouse on the rise above the creek, a raw timber building that smelled of pine resin and Carolina clay. I came with the children, three of them and found a seat near the back as newcomers do, and waited to see what we had come all this way for.

What we had come all this way for walked in from the side door and was larger than I had expected and had a quality of attention — the quality of a man fully present in a room, not performing presence but simply being entirely there, in the way

that certain people are entirely there and most people are partly somewhere else — that I registered in the first moments and did not forget in the subsequent years.

He preached on Psalm one hundred and thirty-two. *Lord, remember David and all his afflictions: how he sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord.*

He was preaching it for us for all of the congregation. For the people who had come from far away and built a meetinghouse in the woods and were trying to make something that would last. I understood that and I felt — not moved, exactly, that is too soft a word — I felt like a woman who has been travelling a long time and has arrived somewhere that was, improbably, expecting her.

I had not been expecting to feel that.

I had been expecting competence. James had promised competence. What Rev Martin delivered was something past competence, something that competence is necessary for but not sufficient to produce.

I thought: *Weel. We hae come til the right place.*

James, sitting beside me, was already entirely at home. He was like that — he did not take long to arrive anywhere. I took longer. But I arrived.

Now I must tell you about his loneliness. I am telling you about this before I tell you about the drinking, because the drinking did not come first. The loneliness came first. And understand-

ing that order matters, in the same way that understanding why a wall has fallen matters more than cataloguing the rubble.

In '77 the majority of Rocky Creek deposed him for alleged intemperance, he had apparantly previously fallen out with Catholic through intemperate speech, but there was no appeal or assistance. They simply retained the meeting house and strangely enough sought the ministrations of a Presbyterian of the *New Light* persuasion and trickled back to Catholic Presbyterian.

Rev Martin and his followers simply moved down the road and built a new meeting house. But we knew this man and loved him, he preached the eternities in his jar of clay with all his failings, he struggled with us and had a high expectation of the work of grace and sanctification in us, which he preached to himself also. He carried the burden of love for his people riding in dark forest trails to be with the dying sinner and expending himself on the frontier of the Gospel. Mr Martin was alone in a way that I do not think most people who observed him from the outside fully understood, because the aloneness was not visible in the way that some kinds of aloneness are visible — in neglected appearance or vacant expression or the particular silence of a man who has stopped expecting company. He was too much himself for it to show that way. He rode, he preached, he visited, he prayed with the sick by name. He was present in the congregational life of Rocky Creek in the way of a man entirely occupied with his purpose.

But the purpose was all there was.

I understood this most clearly in the years after the war, after the dissolution of the Presbytery and the forming of the Associate Reformed Church in '82. I understood it because I

watched what happened around him — watched the congregation, family by family, make their way into the new denomination, with its organised Presbytery and its settled ministers and its accommodation to the constitution and its softness on the harder questions. They went, most of them, because it offered them what a growing country wanted: respectability, order, a faith that did not press quite so hard against the world that was forming around them.

Chester County was growing. The farms were expanding. The plantations to the south and east were becoming something different from what the Scots-Irish settlers had built — bigger, more prosperous, organised around labour arrangements that the first generation would have rejected and the second generation was normalising. The new church sat more easily in this new country. It did not ask, with Rev Martin's directness, what Christ's kingship required of a civil constitution or a labour arrangement or a man's decision about the people working his land. It was a more comfortable home for men whose prosperity was increasing and whose conscience was finding comfort expensive.

And so they went.

Not all. Not us, the Elders, not all of the old families, not the ones for whom the Covenanting inheritance was not a social arrangement but a thing that lived in the blood. But enough of them that his last congregation at Richmond meetinghouse — the small building his remaining supporters had built for him on the Rocky Mount Road after his dismissal by Presbytery— was a remnant in a way the Rocky Creek meeting had never been. A congregation that felt its own smallness every Sabbath,

measuring itself against what it had been and against the well-attended services in the new buildings going up in the county.

Rev Martin preached to us faithfully. Every Sabbath, the text worked through with the same thoroughness, the same unhurried weight, the same conviction that had not diminished because the room was smaller. I attended those services for years and I can tell you the conviction did not diminish. If anything it deepened — the way a river deepens when its banks narrow, the same volume of water moving faster and stronger through the reduced channel.

But he came home to an empty house.

That is the fact I want you to hold. He preached to his remnant with all the conviction of the great years, and then he rode home along the Rocky Mount Road and came through the door of the stone house and the house was empty.

He had been without a wife he valued since Jenny Cherry died, and the third marriage to Susannah Boggs, which he performed himself, had become, by the late '80s, a source of suffering rather than relief — I will say this plainly and say no more about it, because the details of that particular sorrow belong to him and not to me. What I can say is that the house contained no comfort. It contained his desk and his books and the papers he was always writing and the horse in the stable and the fields that needed attending to, and Rev Martin was not a man formed by either inclination or background for the daily management of a farm.

Susannah left him.

He had been a minister since he was twenty-eight years old. Before that he had been a student. He had never been a farmer

in the practical, hands-dirty, fence-mending sense of the word. The plantation had always been managed — first by Jenny, then by hired labour when he could get it, and hired labour in the back country was neither reliable nor affordable on a minister's income, which was itself neither reliable nor abundant, being dependent on the offerings of a remnant congregation that was itself neither prosperous nor numerous.

He was heartened in the spring of '94 when a letter arrived from the Scottish Presbytery enquiring as to the work of the Covenanted Second Reformation in Carolina. He was reinstated, which did not alter his understanding of his call and corresponded with the Scottish Committee. This shone a ray if light into his weariness for a time, but the letters became infrequent making excuses for the failed promises of help.

I went to the house in the winter of '98 and found the kitchen in a state that told the story plainly enough without any words being required. Three days' dishes in the basin. A fire that had been allowed to go out and relit improperly and was smoking rather than burning. Half a sack of cornmeal and nothing else of substance in the larder. Mr Martin was at his desk in the cold study, writing something, coatless, with the specific absorption of a man who has retreated into the one domain where he is entirely competent and is attending to it with something that might, in other circumstances, look like peace but was not quite peace.

I made the fire. I went to the smoke house and found what was there. I cooked.

He ate without comment. Then he said: "*Ye didnae need tae dae that, Mary.*"

I said: "*The fire needed biggin and the meat needed cookin. Somebody wis gonnae dae it.*"

He looked at me across the table. "*A manage*d."

"*Ye did no manage,*" I said. "*Ye survived. Thae are different things and ye ken it.*"

He said nothing to this. He accepted it, which with Rev Martin was its own form of acknowledgment — the absence of the argument meaning that the argument could not honestly be made.

"*Ye need a haun*," I said. "*Wi the ferm. Wi the hoose. Help that's here ilka day, no brocht in as occasion requires.*"

He was quiet for a moment. "*Help costs siller.*"

"*Aye.*"

"*A hae nae siller.*"

This was mostly true. The income from the congregation was uncertain and the farm was not producing what it should have been producing because the farm was not being properly managed and the proper management of it required either money to hire labour or a man with the time and inclination to do the work himself, and Rev Martin had neither.

He looked at the table. Then he said — and I knew from the way he said it that he had been turning it over for some time, approaching it and retreating from it, the way he approached things that troubled his conscience: "*There is a boy. A young Negro. His owner's sellin. The price isnae unreasonable and — if A bocht his indenture — he'd be here. For the ferm.*"

I heard what he was not saying. I heard the discomfort in the way he arranged the words — indenture, price, the careful avoidance of the plain word.

"*A slave*," I said.

"*Aye*." He said it without flinching. Whatever else he was doing, he was not flinching from the word. "*A ken whit it is. A hae preached against it. A ken whit A hae preached.*" He looked at me directly. "*But a man cannae manage a ferm and a congregation and a correspondence and — and ivrything else — his lane. And A cannae pey a hired man. And A dinnae ken whit else tae dae.*"

I sat with this for a moment. I thought about what I could say. I thought about James, who had views on the matter that were clear and who was not present to express them, which was perhaps providential. There were some families in the congregation who had purchased negros. Matthew Stinson had three and John and James Kell both worked them on the farm, even the presbyterian minister Rev Simpson was a slaveowner.

"*It'll come back tae ye*," I said at length. "*In some form. It'll come back.*"

"*A ken it micht*," he said. "A*'m daein it onyway, A'll gie him a hame and mebbe A can improve him in the Christian faith.*"

He said it as he said things that he had resolved — not defiantly, not with the performance of certainty, but with the flat acknowledgment of a man who has run out of alternatives and is proceeding on the basis of what is available rather than what he would prefer.

The boy was called Bob.

He arrived in the spring of 1799 and Rev Martin set him to the farm work — the fencing, the livestock, the clearing of the field edges that had been encroaching for two years, the hundred daily tasks that a working plantation requires and that had been undone or half done or not done since Jenny died. For a season it worked, after a fashion. The farm had a shape again. The house had someone in it when Rev Martin rode out to preach.

But Bob was not trustworthy.

I will say this plainly because it is the truth and because the truth includes uncomfortable things: the boy was not reliable. Whether from resentment — and who could have blamed him for resentment, a young man bought and put to work on another man's land — or from temperament, or from some combination that I was not in a position to assess, he was not the solution that Rev Martin had hoped for. Things went missing. Work that had been assigned was not done. He habitually lied and carried tales. There were incidents I will not enumerate because the enumerating of them would be a cruelty to the memory of a boy I do not know well enough to judge. What I can say is that Rev Martin, who had gone into the arrangement with his eyes open and his conscience already uneasy, found himself in possession of a situation that was worse than the problem it had been meant to solve.

He sold him.

I do not know exactly when. It was sometime in 1800 or 1801 before the Presbytery came. Rev Martin told me about it in one of the Sabbath kitchen visits, with the brevity he used for things that shamed him — not the elaborate brevity of a man managing his image, but the genuine brevity of a man who does not

wish to spend more words on a thing than it deserves, and the thing it deserved was not many words.

"*A sellt Bob*," he said.

"*A ken*," I said. I had heard.

"*It wis wrang tae buy him*," he said. "*And A dinnae ken that sellin him wis better. But A cudnae manage the situation and A — A cudnae manage it.*"

I thought about what to say. "Y*e did whit ye cud see tae dae*," I said, "*and syne ye saw further and did different.*"

He shook his head. "*Dinnae mak it better nor it wis.*" A pause. "*A hae preached against this. Against the hale arrangement. And A bocht a boy because A cudnae manage ma ain ferm.*" Another pause. "*There is somethin in that which is — A dinnae hae the word fer it.*"

"*Humblin,*" I said.

"*Humblin*," he said. "*Aye. That is the word.*"

He received the humbling without excuse and without extended self-reproach, which was characteristically him — the acknowledgment, the taking of it in, and then the proceeding. What he carried from it, I think, was not only the specific shame of the act but a deeper and less speakable shame, which was the shame of a man who had discovered that his principles, held publicly for thirty years, had proven, in the specific pressure of his specific circumstances, more difficult to maintain than he had known when he was preaching them from a pulpit to men who were nodding in agreement.

This was not a new lesson. But it was a lesson he had not previously received in quite this form.

The matter of the Associate Presbytery and slavery I must set down together because together is how they operated in the county — each giving the other a kind of cover, the church's softness on the harder questions making the county's increasing comfort with slave labour easier, and the county's prosperity making the church's softness more attractive. It was not a conspiracy. It did not need to be a conspiracy. It was simply the natural movement of a denomination that had accommodated itself to the new constitution, which had accommodated itself to slavery, finding itself well suited to a region where slavery was becoming the foundation of everything.

They were not cruel about it. I will not say they were cruel. There were good men in the congregations, men of genuine piety, who gave money to missions and educated their children in the Scriptures and sang the Psalms — in harmony, in the new way, which was a difference from Rev Martin's congregation but not the deepest difference. The deepest difference was that their minister in Chester County, on the question of the slave labour increasingly visible on the farms of his congregation, could find a way to be quiet. Could find a way to speak to the heart without pressing the consequences quite as far as the Covenanting position would have required.

Rev Martin could not find that way.

It was not that he was louder or more confrontational than he needed to be. It was something else — he simply could not separate the gospel from its treatment of the people doing the labour. He had never been able to separate these things. It was not a political position added to his beliefs. It was the same belief. Christ was King over nations, which meant this had consequences for the men and women being bought and sold

in the Chester County market, and a minister who preached Christ's kingship without those consequences was preaching something that looked like the Covenanting gospel but was not quite it.

This is not a view that made him popular.

Respectability, in a place that is becoming more prosperous, pulls toward the denomination that asks less, that sits more easily with what the new prosperity requires. Rev Martin's congregation — the remnant at Richmond, the small gathering on the Rocky Mount Road — was a congregation of people who were, for various reasons, not moving toward respectability. Some from conviction. Some from stubbornness. Some because they had been with Rev Martin long enough that moving away from him would have felt like a type of betrayal. This we were not prepared to commit. But we were not many. And the county that was forming around us was forming in a direction that had no place in it for a large old man preaching the full consequences of Christ's kingship from a small timber building on the ridge.

He knew this.

I want to say that plainly because I think it is the thing that is hardest to hold alongside everything else that is true about him: he knew it. He was not unaware of what the county was becoming or of his own position within it. He was not naive about the Associates or about the accommodation or about what the growing slavery meant for the Covenanting witness in the South. He had eyes. He had always had eyes. He himself had been ensnared foolishly in this great sin against the brotherhood of men.

What he did with the knowledge was what he had always done with difficult knowledge — he held it before God and continued. He preached at Richmond. He rode out to the Abbeville society eighty miles away when they needed him, which they did with decreasing regularity. He wrote his letters and his papers and his careful arguments and sent them to the Scottish Presbytery and received replies that were respectful and distant in the way that replies from Scotland to South Carolina tended to be, the distance producing a consideration that was genuinely sympathetic and practically ineffective.

He continued.

But the county did not have a place for him anymore. That is the fact. Not through malice — I will not give the county malice when indifference is the accurate word. He was an older man now, his great voice and his great frame still commanding a room but increasingly commanding a smaller room, and the world forming around him was forming in the shape of a different kind of man — more accommodating, more comfortable with the way things were arranging themselves, less insistent on the consequences of what he preached.

He did not fit it.

He had never fitted it. But in the early years the fitting had not mattered because there was enough work to be done and enough people to do it with and the not-fitting was simply the ordinary friction of a man who insists on things. In the later years the not-fitting had become something else — not friction but displacement, the specific experience of a man who has lived long enough to see the world arrange itself around values that are not his, and to understand that the world will continue arranging itself thus with or without his objection.

Now I must tell you about the drinking.

I am telling you about it after the loneliness and after the farm and after Bob and after the Associates, because that is the honest order of it. Not because I am trying to excuse it — I am not excusing it and I will not dress it up as anything other than what it was. But because the drinking did not appear from nowhere and it does not tell the truth about him if you take it out of the context that produced it, which is the context I have been describing.

I do not know exactly when it began there were the accusations in '77, but I know when I first saw it clearly, which was the winter of '84, three years after the war ended, when the congregation was in the difficult country that follows great difficulty — the years when what sustained people through the crisis has to sustain them through the ordinary and the ordinary is less dramatic and in some ways harder. The congregation had lost men. The back country had lost blood, on both sides, and the violence had not been clean and the aftermath was not peaceful. There were families with grudges against other families. There were Loyalist neighbours returning to land they claimed was still theirs. There was the grinding ordinary business of rebuilding what had been burned and burying what could not be rebuilt and finding a way to live alongside people you had, eighteen months earlier, been trying to kill.

Rev Martin was doing all of this. He was doing it alone.

He had done it alone, essentially, since the war. The other ministers of the Presbytery — such as it was, the Presbytery of the Covenanters in America at that time a thing that existed more in intention than in practice — were scattered. He was

the sole minister in the back country. He had been the sole minister in the back country for most of the time since his coming to America, with occasional visiting brethren who came, preached, and left, and whose leaving he bore with the resignation of a man who has made his peace with the fact that he will always be, in the most important respects, alone. In that winter of 1784 I brought a pot of soup to the manse — Nancy was married and his second wife Jenny was dead five years, she was a good woman who had managed his household with the practical competence he singularly lacked, and the manse without her and Nancy was already beginning to show the chaos that a house shows when the person who holds it together is no longer present — and I found him asleep in the chair by a cold fire at two in the afternoon with a bottle beside him, half empty.

I set the soup on the table.

I built the fire.

I washed the three cups that were in the basin.

When he woke he looked at me with the grey eyes and said nothing. I said nothing. I poured the soup and put it before him and sat down across the table. He ate it. We sat in the kitchen in the December afternoon with the fire going and the soup finished and the bottle on the table between us, and the silence had the quality of a silence between people who are not pretending.

Then he said: "*A ken whit ye're thinkin, Mary Elder.*"

I said: "*A'm thinkin ye need somebody tae bring ye soup.*"

He looked at me. "*That's no aw ye're thinkin.*"

"*Naw*," I said. "*It's no aw. But it's whit A'm sayin.*"

He was quiet for a moment. Then he said — and this is one of the things I have held most carefully, in all the years since, because it was the most honest thing I ever heard him say about himself:

"*A'm no a man that kens whit tae dae wi nae yin tae come hame til.*"

He said it plainly. Not for sympathy — Rev Martin was not a man who solicited sympathy, it sat badly on him, he did not know what to do when it arrived. He said it as a fact. As an explanation, if not an excuse.

I thought about Mary his first wife, that Nancy Anderson had told me about, dead young in Ulster. I thought about Jenny his second, dead here, I thought about Susannah Boggs whom he married in grief as a helpmeet, gone and scandalising his name by her foolish tongue in the county. I thought about the thirty years between the two deaths in which he had been, in the most practical sense, alone with his calling, the calling absorbing everything, the man behind the calling having to find his own resources for the times when the calling did not fill the whole space.

And now there was no Presbytery to write to. No colleague to argue with. No Matthew Lynn. The dissolution of the Reformed Presbytery had taken from him not only the structure but the correspondence of men who understood exactly what he was doing and why, who had been formed in the same tradition and held the same inheritance and could speak to him without requiring the ground to be laid first. Lynn had gone into the union. Dobbin had gone into the union. Cuthbertson, the old pioneer of the Pennsylvania work, we knew these men before we took the Virginia road south and they had all gone into the union. And Rev Martin remained outside it, alone, in

the same position he had occupied in Ulster — the sole minister, the one who holds the ground when everyone else has found somewhere easier to stand.

Twice in his life he had been the sole minister. Twice. And the second time had no end in sight.

I said: "*Come til us on the Sabbaths efter the service. James'll want tae argy theology wi ye and A'll want ye tae bide fer yer supper.*"

He looked at me with the grey eyes. "*That's charity*," he said.

"*It's supper,*" I said. "*Dinnae mak it mair nor it is.*"

He came.

He came nearly every Sabbath for the next twelve years, until James died and then the arrangement shifted — he still came but it was different, the three of us becoming two of us and then the two of us finding a different way to be useful to each other, the way that people who have been neighbours in difficulty for a long time find ways to go on being useful that do not require explanation or ceremony.

The drinking did not stop.

I will not tell you it stopped because it did not stop, not entirely, not permanently. It waxed and waned with the difficulty of his circumstances, which in the back country in those years was a waxing and waning of considerable range. There were years when it was a thing I saw rarely and it sat lightly in the pattern of neighbourly hospitality, the visitor left with a warm heart but a heavy head. There were years when it was a thing that several of the elders spoke to him about with the mixture of love and

alarm that characterises the approach of a man who must say a hard thing to someone he respects.

He received these conversations in the way he received most things that he could not dispute — not with contrition exactly, not with the elaborate self-reproach that makes the person apologising feel better without changing anything, but with a stillness that acknowledged the thing being said and did not pretend it away. He would say: "*Aye. Ye're richt. A ken it.*" And then he would proceed, imperfectly, with the effort to be better, and the effort would succeed for a time and fail for a time and succeed again, in the pattern of most human efforts to overcome the things in themselves that they know to be wrong.

He was not, in this, different from most people.

He was different from most people in that everything he did was visible — the minister's life is a life conducted in public in a way that the farmer's life and the tradesman's life are not. Every failing was a failing in front of four hundred people, then in front of a smaller number, then in front of the remnant at Richmond. Every recovery was also in front of them. He had no privacy for his struggle.

What I want to say — and I want to say it carefully because it is the easiest thing to get wrong — is that the loneliness and the drinking and the farm and the Bob affair and the dissolution and the ARP drawing away the congregation were not separate things. They were the same thing, seen from different angles. They were the shape of a man who had been formed for a purpose that required a community, a Presbytery, a church structure, a household, colleagues, the full equiptment of the ministerial life as he had known it in Ulster — and who was

attempting to discharge that purpose with almost none of those things in place.

A man cannot manage a farm alone. He cannot manage a congregation alone. He cannot manage a Presbytery alone. He cannot manage a life alone, not over the long course of it, not without something breaking under the weight.

What broke was manageable. He was still standing. He was still preaching at Richmond every Sabbath, still sitting with the dying and naming the sick in prayer. The breaking was not catastrophic. It was the kind of breaking that happens along the grain of a man's character, in the places where the wood was thinnest, which in his case was not the preaching and not the theology and not the courage. It was the ordinary daily business of being a human being in a body in a house on a farm in a county, which required the kind of practical sustaining that he had always depended on others to provide and which, in those years, he was largely providing for himself, and doing it badly, and knowing he was doing it badly, and having no good alternative.

He preached, in those years, perhaps the finest sermons I ever heard.

This seems like a contradiction and I understand why it seems that way. A man whose private life is disordered does not seem like a man who should be capable of the finest sermons. Perhaps he was preaching them to himself firstly as a preacher should do. But I observed it too many times to doubt it: the disorder and the grace existed in him simultaneously, not cancelling each other out but both fully present, the way good

soil and bad weather can exist in the same season and produce, against all reasonable expectation, a harvest.

I think — and this is my own thought, not theology, I have no training in theology — I think that what happened in the pulpit was not separate from what happened in the rest of his life but was connected to it by something I do not have the language for. That the man who was too old and too alone — this same man was the one who stood in the pulpit at Richmond and spoke of God's sufficiency in the desert place with a conviction that came from inhabiting the desert place, not from observing it from a comfortable distance. That the weakness and the preaching were drawing from the same well, which was his own life laid entirely open to the text.

He was not a man who preached from safety. He never had been.

There was a Sabbath, back in the winter of '97 when James had been dead for two years and I was still finding the shape of life without him, which was a finding that took considerably longer than people who had not lost a husband of thirty years seemed to expect, and Rev Martin preached on the twenty-second Psalm. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

He did not resolve the Psalm quickly. He did not rush to the resurrection at the end of it — the turn in verse twenty-four where the lament becomes praise. He stayed in the forsaken place. He preached it with the authority of a man who knew the forsaken place by longitude and latitude, who had his own coordinates for it and would not pretend those coordinates were elsewhere.

He said: "*There's fowk in this room that hae prayed and heard naethin. That hae socht the face o God and fund an absence. That hae done*

ivrything that faith requires and gotten, in return, silence." He paused. "*A'm no gonnae tell ye the silence isnae real. A'm gonnae tell ye that the Son o God prayed this prayer and meant it and that it is therefore a prayer that has been prayed frae inside the Godheid itsel, that the silence wisnae ootside God's knowledge but inside it, and that nae human bein that has ever prayed intae silence has prayed intae a silence that God disnae ken frae the inside.*"

I sat in the pew and felt what I had felt on the first Sabbath, years before.

Arrived.

That was still the word.

The matter of slavery I must speak of plainly, beyond what I have already said about Bob.

Rev Martin was against it. He had been against it since before most of his congregation had formed a settled opinion on it. He had said so from the pulpit in language that was unambiguous and repeated. He had purchased a boy and sold a boy and carried the weight of both decisions, and in the carrying of them had perhaps understood the question in a way that purely theoretical opposition does not provide.

What he also understood — and said, from the pulpit and in private — was the county's direction of travel. The ARP congregation in Chester was the respectable congregation now. Its minister did not press the slavery question with Mr Martin's directness. It was not that they were in favour of slavery — I will not say that, it would not be accurate. But there is a distance between opposing a thing and making the opposition costly, and they had found a place to stand that was short of the costly

distance. This made it a comfortable home for men whose farms were growing and whose labour arrangements were growing with them. A man who owned six slaves and worshipped at a congregation on Sabbath could hold his faith and his ledger book in the same hands without feeling the friction that Rev Martin's preaching would have produced between them.

Rev Martin felt the friction. He produced the friction. He could not stop producing it because it was not, for him, a position he had adopted. It was what the gospel cost, plainly stated. He presssed it but in our smallness was unable to act on it.

"*The county*," he said to me once, in the later years, "*has decided whit kind o kirk suits the county. A kirk that disnae trouble the county's arrangements. A kirk that sings its Psalms in harmony and keeps its harder opinions fer the pamphlets that naebody reads.*" He said it without bitterness, which was what made it the most bitter thing I ever heard him say. "*A dinnae suit the county onymair. A dinnae ken that A ever did.*"

He said it as a man states a fact that has been a long time arriving and is now fully arrived.

I did not know what to say to this because it was true.

After that march meeting of Presbytery we followed him out of the new brick meeting house that the Covenanters had built seeking preaching from the new presbytery. They got a man, Thomas Donnelly, a godly man but he did not have the gravity of one who knew the people, who had brought these people here, cut the fields from the woods and cane-brake, rode the trails and suffered and rebuilt. But Rev Donnelly did not have Mr Martin's flaws and as the generation of Ulstermen and

women passed, they needed a new man. Men of the Covenant? Men of their time?

He was a man out of place. Not out of time — I resist that framing, the framing of a man born too soon or too late, because it reduces him to an accident of history rather than a man who held a position. He held the position. The position was right. The county moved around him into a different shape and the shape did not include his kind of ministry, his kind of directness, his kind of insistence on the full consequences of what Christ's kingship required. That is not a failure of the man. That is a failure of the county, and of the church that suited the county, and of the age that was forming around him like a river forming new banks and leaving the old course dry.

But the old course was where he stood. And it was dry. And he stood in it anyway, and preached to his remnant at Richmond every Sabbath, and came to my kitchen on Sabbath evenings when he could.

I want to say this clearly before I close: it was not nothing! A man standing in the dry course of the river, holding the ground, is something. The ground he held is the ground the church was eventually able to return to — the ground on which the testimony against slavery was built, the ground on which the full Covenanting position was maintained when almost everyone around it had accommodated themselves to something lesser.

He held it. Imperfectly, humanly, with a bottle on the table sometimes and a farm that did not quite work and a congregation that was smaller every year and a county that had arranged itself around values that were not his.

He held it anyway.

In the summer of 1805, he was seventy-six. He had been living in an arrangement that I can only describe as managed independence — his daughter Nancy and her husband had moved to a house near enough to provide practical assistance, his own space preserved in the way that men of his character need space preserved, with the particular dignity of a man who has not quite finished doing what he was put here to do.

Then Nancy, the joy of his heart, died.

He came to my house on a Tuesday — he still rode, though the mare was older than she should have been for the terrain — and we sat in the kitchen in the summer heat with the door open to the yard and the sound of the creek faint in the distance, and we ate fresh oatcakes and churned butter and talked about the state of the church.

We always talked about the state of the church.

He said it was better than it had been. He said there were young men coming to America who had both the learning and the fire. He said the Presbytery has reformed with men from Ulster and that the growth was in the right direction — not by softening the demands of the Covenant but by making them comprehensible to a generation that had not grown up with the persecution that had made the demands obvious to their fathers. He said the work was not finished but it was established, which was the difference between a thing that had been planted and a thing that was growing.

I said: "*Are ye content?*"

He thought about this with the seriousness he gave to questions that deserved seriousness.

"*A'm no a man built fer content,*" he said, at length. "*But A am—*" He paused. "*A'm at peace wi whit wis askit o me and whit A did wi it. No wi ivrything A did. Wi the shape o it.*"

I thought about the shape of it. The shape of it was seventy-six years of William Martin — Ulster and Glasgow and the crossing and the back country and the war and the farm and the loneliness and the failures and the extraordinary grace that ran through the failures like water through rock, finding its way regardless.

"*That's enough,*" I said.

He looked at me with the grey eyes. They were older now, the grey of them deeper, but the quality of attention was the same quality I had seen on the first Sabbath in 1773, when he was a man in his prime and I was a woman who had not wanted to come to Carolina and was finding herself, against her better judgment, arrived.

"*Aye*," he said. "*It's enough.*"

We sat in the summer kitchen with the door open and the creek faint in the distance and the years between us, years of grief and harvest and the long argument with the ground, and the peace that was not contentment but was its own kind of sufficiency, the peace of people who have done what they were given to do and are sitting now in the afternoon of it, with the creek in the distance and nothing left to prove.

He left at four.

I watched him ride away down the lane on the old mare, his white head bare in the summer sun.

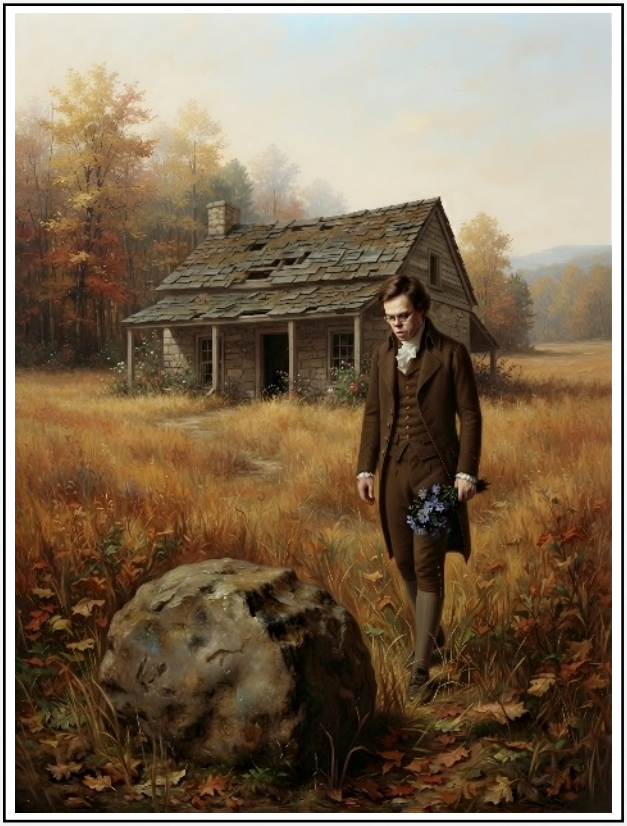
In the spring, he had been coming to visit my aged father who had followed us many years ago and was now living with me, when crossing a creek at Stroud's Mill on the way, somehow he got the head of his horse turned up the wrong way towards the creek by the path and he fell off the horse into the water. Mr Thralekill, our neighbour found him praying and being an old man, unable to rise, he discovered he was headed here and sent for my father. He lay more than a month in a fever, in his delirium constantly quoting scripture and speaking of crossing the Jordan.

When he recovered enough he returned home. His old neighbour John Lynn came to bring him home on a wagon, just as he had first come to Chester County in the early spring of '73. The wagon clattered on the rocky road to Rocky Creek, Rev Martin's large form, withered by the ague, gathered in a woollen blanket they had brought from Ulster.

I did not know it was the last time I would see him.

It is always the last time before you know it is the last time.

That is the nature of last times.



"On the path into the encroaching woodland was a late profusion of sky blue Asters lifting their yellow hearts to the last of the sun. From some uncharacteristic impulse I plucked them and placing them on William Martin's grave it seemed to lighten the fading autumn shadows." Page 269

EPILOGUE

The Jordan

Rocky Creek, South Carolina — November, 1807

Rev. Samuel B. Wylie, minister of the Reformed Presbytery

The letter reached me in Philadelphia in the third week of November.

It was written by John Lynn's widow of Chester County —The *Reverend William Martin*, he wrote, *had died on the fourteenth of October 1806, at his house on the north fork of Rocky Creek. He was seventy-seven years old.*

The death had been peaceful, if the word peaceful could be applied to what he described — and here the letter became, briefly, something more than the tremulous handwriting, something that reached across the miles between Rocky Creek and Philadelphia with a specificity that only the true detail produces. How my heart was unjustified to have the passing thought that Martin's habit had in the end borne its fruit. But I felt rebuked to believe such a verdict without knowledge.

In the spring, he had suffered a fall from his horse and he lay more than a month in delirium He recovered enough to return home, but again became ill. John Lynn's daughter and a niece of Matthew Lynn watched over his fever. A fever, coming and going. Lynn wrote that, in the last days he had spoken less but prayed more — aloud, long prayers, in the manner of his public prayers, the way he had always prayed as though God were in the room and the room were a serious place. At intervals he had quoted Scripture, not randomly but with the particular purposefulness of a man organising his last thoughts, choosing the

texts he wanted to carry into the next part of the journey across the Jordan.

On the last morning he had risen before anyone could prevent him, which widow Lynn reported with the slight exasperation of a woman who had been trying to show a neighbour's care for several years and had not succeeded. He had dressed. He had walked — with difficulty, the fever still on him — down the slope to the creek, to the particular flat rock above the ford where he was known to pray in the mornings when the weather permitted and sometimes when it did not.

They found him there an hour later. Kneeling on the flat rock above the water. His eyes were closed. He was still speaking — they could hear it as they came down the slope, the murmur of it over the sound of the creek — but when they reached him the words had become unclear, the fever taking the sense out of the language while leaving the form of prayer intact.

He was quoting, they thought, from the second Psalm. *Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*

He died on the flat rock above Rocky Creek.

They carried him up the slope to the house.

They buried him in the pasture near his cabin, the farm being sold already and his farmhouse consumed in an accidental fire. There was no place for his dust among the saints at new Rocky Creek brick meeting house that will surely bear testimony to the last of the Covenanters in the south.

I set the letter down on my desk and looked out the window at Philadelphia in December.

I thought about the meetinghouse in March 1801. The journey down the muddy spring cart tracks of the Great Wagon Road, following the Ulstermen of generations before the Revolution. I thought about the abruptness of the constitution of Presbytery which had not included this man who had been the voice, the lampstand the salt and light of the Christ's Royal claims. Then I thought about the old man bare headed, standing before the table of young ministers. Who were we to charge a man who was a giant of the Covenant. By what warrant had Ireland forgotten his labours. Did we presume that he was a member of the new Presbytery, we had never asked his permission. He had cooperated with the committee of the Scottish Presbytery and we were fanning the dying flame in his old heart to validate the cause of the Covenanter in the south. I thought about reading the charges. I thought about the words I had said — the formal, necessary, inadequate words — and the one bow of his great head, and the door opening, and the cold coming in off the pines.

I thought about the question I had sat with in the empty meetinghouse after the others had left.

I had heard from others of the June sermon in 1780 that had drawn so many into the actions of the war against the British and the text from Numbers ten that speaks of Moses' *silver trumpets.* Martin had been used himself to assemble the people and guide them in their journeyings. He had brought them here to Rocky Creek but now they were scattered by death and adventure, but he himself had wandered off in his remaining years while keeping to the same fields of his labours.

Six years had passed. I had not stopped thinking about the question. I had thought about it in the way that questions stay with you when they are attached to something real — not as an abstract problem of theodicy but as the specific case of a specific man, a man I had sat across a table from and looked at and who had looked back at me with the grey eyes and the patience of a man who had stood before more important courts than mine and was not afraid of the verdict.

I had been twenty-eight years old at the deposition. I had done what I believed needed to be done. I still believed it. The discipline of the church is not administered on the basis of a man's greatness, because if greatness were the criterion for exemption then the discipline would have no criterion at all, only the variable impressions of those who happened to be present and who happened to be moved.

I had done what needed to be done.

And I had been sitting with what I had done ever since, not in the anguish of regret — I have said I still believed it necessary, and I do — but in the more complicated territory of a man who has done a necessary thing and knows its cost and cannot pretend the cost is not real.

He continued to preach after the deposition disregarding the authority of Presbytery, but he had never really been a member of the old Pennsylvanian Reformed Presbytery still less the Presbytery re-formed. He preached irregularly, informally, without the structures of office, but he continued. Reports came to me from the back country — travellers, visiting ministers, letters — about the old deposed minister who was still being found at crossroads and in houses and at camp meetings, still speaking the word, still praying for the sick in visitation, still

insisting that Christ was King over the nations and over the Constitution and from Him we cannot declare independence.

I received these reports.

I did not know what to do with them.

I still do not know exactly what to do with them. I hold them alongside the charges and the deposition and the necessary decision, and all of it together makes up what I know of William Martin, which is that he was a man in whom the grace of God operated with unusual power and at great cost, and that the cost was paid not only by him but by the people around him and that the grace was received not only by him but by the people around him, and that both of these things — the cost and the grace — were entirely real and entirely his.

I went back to Rocky Creek in the fall, as they call it, of 1807 in the ministry of Thomas Donnelly, who was a minister of settled times and not a pioneer.

I went back, not specifically to visit Martin's grave, though I did visit it — he does not lie in the churchyard of the new Rocky Creek meetinghouse, the one built for those who left the deposed Martin for the Presbytery.

The blank field stone rests over his bones near to his stone cabin decaying like the memory of these pioneers who held back the forest that crept ever closer to his grave. Youth has all gone west and the spirit of those days with them. This was correct. But Martin would not have wanted elaboration.

On the path into the encroaching woodland was a late profusion of sky blue Asters lifting their yellow hearts to the last of the sun. From some uncharacteristic impulse I plucked them

and placing them on William Martin's grave it seemed to lighten the fading autumn shadows.

I went because the congregation had asked me to preach and because I thought I owed them a visit, having been the instrument of the deposition and having not been back since. There are debts that are not financial but are equally real, and the going back is one form of paying them. But there had been problems that McKinney had not been able to resolve in his assistance to Donnelly. Something of the individuality of Martin remained among these people.

I preached on a Sabbath morning to a full meetinghouse — the congregation Martin had built, the children and grandchildren of the people who had crossed on the Lord Dunluce and come up the Wagon Road and gathered at Rocky Creek in the years before the war, now grown and settled and farming the ground and raising their own children in the faith their parents had carried here through such extraordinary cost.

I preached on the seventy-second Psalm. The Psalm of Solomon, the king who rules from sea to sea and to whom all nations bring their gifts, the Psalm that ends:

His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.

It was the Psalm from which William Martin had preached his first sermon in this country — I had been told this by Jean Stinson, who told me many things I needed to know before she died the following winter. The first sermon, in the raw timber room of Catholic, to the congregation that had built it.

I gave out the line.

They sang it in the old way, the tune passed down from Scotland through Ulster through the Atlantic crossing through the back-country years into these voices, these faces, this morning.

I stood at the pulpit and listened to them sing.

I thought: *this is whit he built.*

Not the building — the building was new brick mellowing in the Carolina sun, it would need replacing again in another generation. Not the institution — the institution would grow and change and was already growing and changing in ways he would have approved of and ways he would have disputed vigorously. Not even the theology, exactly — the theology was older than him and would outlast him and needed him only as one link in its long transmission across the centuries.

What he built was this: a people who knew who they were.

A people who knew the ground under them was not the physical ground of any particular country but the living God of the Covenant, who had led Israel through the wilderness and the Covenanters through the persecution and William Martin through seventy-seven years of the extraordinary and ordinary and failing and continuing, and who was the same God in Carolina as in Ulster as on the Atlantic as in the valley of the shadow as at the flat rock above Rocky Creek where an old man in a fever knelt and prayed until the praying became unclear and then became something beyond the clarity of human language.

They sang to the end of the Psalm.

Let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen.

The room was quiet.

I stood in the pulpit for a moment, looking at the congregation. At the faces that bore, in their shapes and their particular quality of attention, the marks of the people who had made them — the Ulster faces and the Scotch-Irish faces and the faces that were already something new, something formed in this latitude and this light.

I thought about the question I had asked myself in March 1801, in the empty meetinghouse after the deposition.

Whit dis God mak o a man like yon?

I thought I could see part of the answer now. Not the whole of it — the whole of it was not available from where I stood, and perhaps not from anywhere this side of the final accounting. But part of it:

He makes this. He makes these people. He makes this singing. He makes the faith that crossed the water in the voices of those men and women and children and is now in the voices of their children and will be in the voices of the children of their children, carried forward through time the way all living things are carried forward — not unchanged, not without loss, not without the specific human cost of every generation that receives the inheritance and decides whether to pass it on.

He makes the flat rock above the creek.

He makes the old man kneeling on it in the morning fever, quoting the second Psalm, *ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance* — asking still, at seventy-seven, at the last breath, asking with the confidence not of a man who has always received what he asked for but of a man who has asked long

enough to know that the asking itself is the right orientation of a human life, the right posture, the right direction to face.

Ask of me.

He asked. All his life he asked. With the Psalms in his mouth and the Bible under his arm and the horse on the road and the people around him and the failures in his account and the grace running through the failures like water through rock.

He asked.

And I — who deposed him, who read the charges, who did the necessary thing and have been sitting with its cost ever since — I think that the asking was received.

I think it was received and answered in ways that the deposition and the charges and the formal minutes of the Presbytery cannot account for, because they are not made for that accounting.

I think the flat rock above Rocky Creek is holy ground.

I gave the benediction.

"*The Lord bless ye, an' keep ye: The Lord mak his face tae shine 'anunder ye, an' be kin' tae ye: The Lord lif' up his coontenance ower ye, an' gie ye peace.* "

The congregation rose.

They went out into the Carolina fall — into the particular morning light of late October in the Piedmont, the dogwood well coloured along the creek, the pines moving in the gentle wind, the ground that had been cleared and broken and planted and harvested and fought over and grieved over and given to children and grandchildren and strangers, the good dark ground of Rocky Creek that was not the ground of their

inheritance but had become it, the way all grounds become the grounds of inheritance — through the labour of the people who loved them and the blood of the people who died on them and the faith of the people who believed, against all evidence of political indifference, that the Lord of the whole earth had a purpose for this particular piece of it.

I stood in the empty meetinghouse.

The creek was faint in the distance and a bluejay anounced *this is America*!

The last of the congregation had gone out into the sunlight and gently drifting leaves.

I picked up my Bible from the pulpit — my own Bible, not Martin's, my Bible that I had been carrying since Philadelphia — and I walked to the door and I stood in the doorway the way Martin had stood in the doorway of the first raw timber room of Catholic in February 1773 and I looked out at the late morning. The way he stood in this doorway in March 1801, believing the hand of God was still upon his hoary old head.

And I said — not for the congregation, they were gone, not for any record, not in any official capacity — I said it to the pines and the creek and the dogwood and the good dark ground:

"*Blessed be his glorius name for iver.*

An' let the haill earth be filled wi' his glorie.

Amen And amen."

FINIS

THE AUTHOR'S NOTE

A historical novel is not a biography, and this one does not pretend to be. The distinction matters and the reader deserves to know where the documented record ends and the interpretation begins.

The Narrators.

David Martin Sr, Mary Martin, his first wife, William Anderson, Jean Stinson, Nancy Martin, Captain Alasdair Gillis, Daniel Stinson, Matthew Lynn, Mary Elder, Samuel Wylie — these are all characters that appear in the historical record. Their interior lives, their dialogues, their particular experiences, are the novelist's invention. Mary Elder is especially significant in this regard: the voice given to her in Chapter Fifteen — the most directly reflective chapter in the novel — is a fictional construction, though it is grounded in the kinds of things that people who knew Martin said about him, as recorded in the family accounts.

Colonel John Phillips. As noted above, the historical record attests to the intercession of a British officer of Irish origin at Martin's trial before Cornwallis. The name John Phillips, the detail of County Antrim, the interior life is constructed from the specific exchange at the interview which is recorded in the anecdotal accounts. The fact of the intercession and its result are historical.

Captain James Gillis. There is a surviving record of the name of the captain of the Lord Dunluce on the 1772 crossing. The broad facts of the crossing — its duration, the illness aboard, the quarantine at Sullivan's Island, the practice of Sabbath worship on deck — are attested or strongly inferred from

accounts of similar crossings of the period and the letter published in the Belfast News Letter following the successful crossing.

Daniel Stinson. The account of the War Sermon in Chapter Ten is built on attested facts — the sentinels, the text, the result in terms of mustered men — filtered through the perspective of a thirteen-year-old. While Daniel left a written record, the device is the novelist's, chosen because children are the most honest observers of events they do not yet have the framework to manage, and because the War Sermon was precisely the kind of event that shaped the people who witnessed it for the rest of their lives.

The Glasgow years. The historical record indicates Martin received university formation in Scotland. His time at Glasgow, his engagement with Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment, his encounters with the intellectual challenges to faith that defined that period — these are inferred from what we know of his education and his subsequent preaching, which shows the marks of a man who had thought seriously about the objections to his faith rather than simply avoiding them. The specific encounters and the fictional Agnes are invented.

The interior life. The most significant act of invention in this novel, as in all historical fiction, is the giving of interior experience to people about whom the record gives us only externals. We know what Martin did. We know, from the surviving accounts, something of what he said — his sermons, his remarks in Presbytery, the remark about the Declaration of Independence before Cornwallis, the comment about the slave Bob. We do not know what he felt, what he doubted, what he thought in the night watches. That interior life is the novelist's

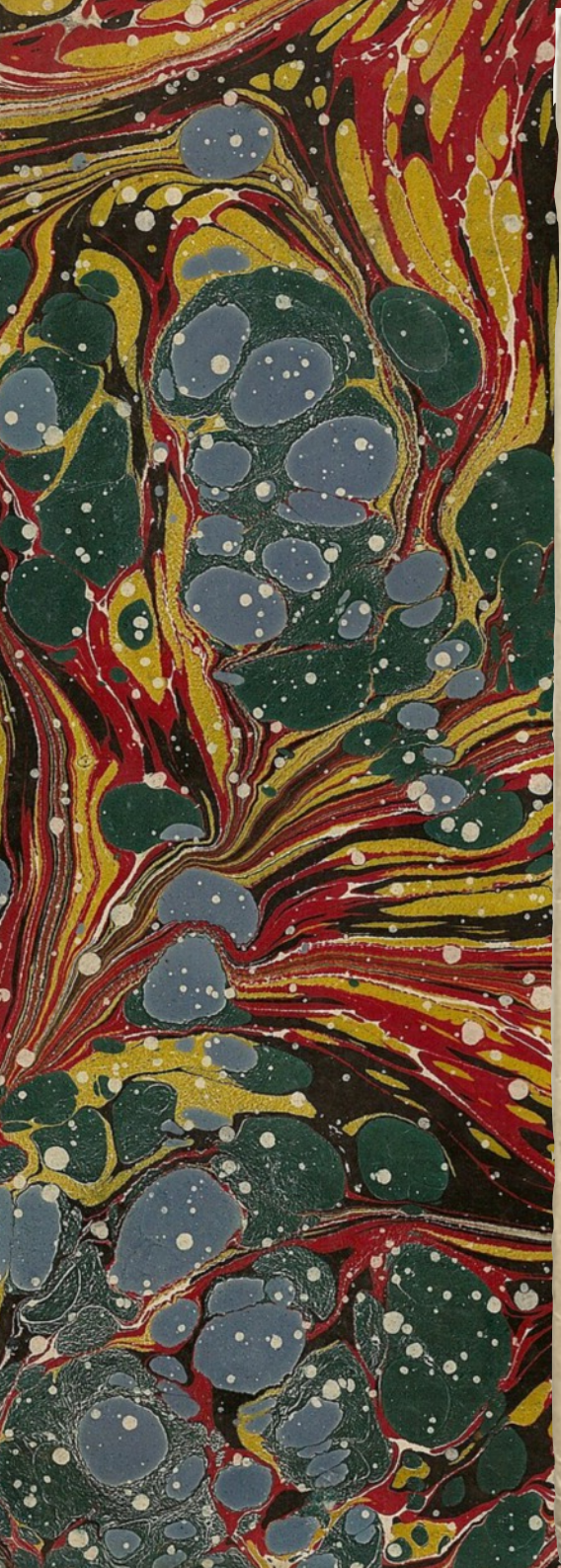
construction, built as faithfully as possible from the externals but ultimately an act of imagination.

The same applies to all the narrators. Samuel Wylie's complex feelings about the deposition, his journey from certainty to something more textured — these are invented, though not, the novelist hopes, inconsistent with what we know of the man and his subsequent long ministry.

The author's hope is that this novel does justice to that life — not by making it larger than it was, but by making it visible in its actual size, which is large enough.

The grave at Rocky Creek still stands. The stone is plain. The congregation of Rocky Creek Reformed Presbyterian Church because of its stand against slavery, has long since moved to the mid-western states where it practically engaged in the *underground railway*, assisting escaped slaves. There those descendants, many still bearing the names of the Scotch – Irish continue to testify to Christ's Crown and Covenant.

The Author



ABOUT THE NOVEL

For Christ's Crown and Covenant draws on the detailed biographical records of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, on the session and presbytery minutes of the Rocky Creek congregation, and on the family traditions preserved by the Andersons, Stephensons, Elders, and Stinsons who crossed the Atlantic with Martin in 1772 and built their lives alongside his in Chester County, South Carolina.

The Cornwallis dialogue is historical. The War Sermon is reconstructed from four surviving eyewitness accounts. The deposition charges are taken from the presbytery minutes verbatim. What the novel adds to the record is the interior life that the minutes cannot contain — the fear, the grief, the faith, and the extraordinary stubbornness of a man who had decided, somewhere in the back country of South Carolina, that Christ's kingship over the nations was not an opinion to be softened when the company found it inconvenient.

It is a novel about the Covenanting tradition — its theology, its Psalms, its insistence that earthly kings rule under a higher authority and are answerable to it — but it is equally a novel about what faith costs the people who carry it, and what it produces in the world when they do not set it down.

THE VOICES OF THE NOVEL

David Martin Sr · William Martin · Mary Martin · William Anderson - Jean Stephenson · Nancy Martin · Matthew Lynn · Captain James Gillis - Daniel Stinson · Colonel John Phillips · Mary Elder · Rev. Samuel B. Wylie